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# THE KARNATAK THEATRE

*by*

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*With a Foreword by*

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## FOREWORD

“THE KARNATAK THEATRE ” by Dr. H. K. Ranganath, is a thesis accepted by the Karnatak University for the Ph. D. Degree in Kannada and is now being published by the University. The University Grants Commission has agreed to finance the cost of the publication of this thesis to the extent of 50%.

The thesis deals with the development of the theatre in Karnataka through the ages. An erudite attempt has been made in Chapter II to trace the antiquity of the Karnatak theatre. From the literary and inscripational evidences, the author rightly concludes that the Karnatak theatre has been in a flourishing condition more or less from about the 10th century A. D. onwards. Though the Karnatak theatre was in its hey-day nearly a thousand years ago, the fact remains, however, that Kannada language did not possess drama as a part of literature until recently. ‘Mitravinda Govinda ’ by Alasingarya of the 17th century is the first available drama in Kannada literature and this again is just a translation of the Sanskrit play Ratnāvali. It appears that the following items of the entertainment monopolised the stage during the past :

- ( 1 ) Theme-dance.
- ( 2 ) The Folk dramas.
- ( 3 ) The Yakṣagānas.
- ( 4 ) Sanskrit plays.

This is borne out by the fact that most of the court performances consisted of either Sanskrit plays or theme-dances. These court performances were obviously meant for the classes and not the masses. The elite of those days could stage, see and enjoy Sanskrit plays. That might, perhaps, be one of the reasons as to why Kannada Scholars and Poets in olden days did not feel the necessity of writing or producing dramas in Kannada. Occasionally, however, Sanskrit plays might have been translated and enacted for the entertainment of the masses.

The theme-dances were full of music and dance without any prose dialogue. The gesture of the hands, limbs, eyes etc. would be employed to convey the necessary feelings and emotions.

The folk-dramas and Yakṣagānas form an important land mark in the development of the Karnatak theatre. Dr. Ranganath gives a detailed account of the folk theatre and rightly shows that the folk theatre preceded the classical one. He even infers that the Dravidian

theatre might have influenced the Āryan theatre, which, however, is a point of controversy. In any case, the folk-dramas and Yakṣagānas have provided entertainment and joy for all people in the Karnatak for thousands of years.

The chapter on the 'Professional Stage' catalogues the various professional theatrical associations in different parts of Karnatak, viz., Bombay Karnatak, Hyderabad Karnatak, Old Mysore, South Canara etc. It also gives a lucid account of the achievements of these Associations and of the artists.

It is natural that a book dealing with the Karnatak stage should contain a reference to the part played by the amateurs in the development of the modern Kannada stage. Dr. Ranganath rightly refers to this topic. Playwrights like T. P. Kailasam, Shriranga and others have enriched the modern Kannada literature by their works well-known for their wit and humour. The amateurs and professionals who have made earnest endeavours to stage the plays written by the modern dramatists have rendered yeoman's service in popularising the Kannada stage. Despite these efforts, the Kannada language has much leeway to make up in the production and staging of serious and humorous dramas which would appeal to the common man.

Finally I congratulate Dr. H. K. Ranganath on his laudable work involving great labour and thinking and hope that its publication will give a fillip to the movement of the Kannada Theatre.

KARNATAK UNIVERSITY DHARWAR  
1ST MARCH, 1960

**D. C. Pawate**

## PREFACE

As in other branches of culture, Karnatak has created for itself a unique position in the field of art and architecture. This fact is borne out by evidences that have stood the test of time,—evidences like Karnatak Music and Sculpture. Historical Karnatak saw the development of all the fine-arts from architecture and sculpture to literature and music. The beginnings of this development can be traced to the hoary past, for, one of the many strange things revealed by the excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa is the intimate affinity in the matters of art between the central South—the mainland of Karnatak—and ‘The Land of the Dead.’

That apart, there are literary and epigraphical evidences which indicate that the Kannada theatre is quite ancient. One can trace its development from at least a thousand years ago. Like the music and architecture of the land, its drama could also boast of an impressive past. It exerted considerable influence on the neighbouring regions and helped them to advance further, just as, later, these regions influenced Kannada drama, enriching it and helping its advance.

The material available for writing a history of the Kannada theatre is meagre. With regard to Karnatak Music, the story is different, for, independent works came to be written from the early 13th century by eminent ‘exponent-critics’ like Sārangadeva, Kallinātha and Purandaradāsa,<sup>1</sup> which have been preserved. Architecture also has preserved its story in its great moments. The history of the Kannada theatre, however, has remained unwritten for want of reliable and connected material. But even the available evidences—scanty as they are—clearly indicate the antiquity and glory of the Karnatak theatre.

The professional theatre of any region in India is just about a hundred years old and yet, considerable research and writing on the regional theatre has been done in Bengal and Maharashtra, but the Kannada country does not seem to have made any effort to present either in Kannada or English a recorded history of even its professional theatre. There are quite a few articles, mostly in Kannada, published by different magazines during the last thirty years, and they do provide some links and enable one to build up the history of development of

1. Even today, in the Tamilnad and Andhra, the heart of Karnatak music, basic lessons include Geetavali in *Kannada* set by Purandaradāsa.

the Kannada stage during the past hundred years. These, however have never been brought together into a connected story.

This absence of an authoritative history has rendered considerable injustice to the Karnatak theatre, because, in the books written in English aiming at introducing the different regional theatres of India, Kannada stage is either not mentioned, or, if mentioned, is misrepresented. Mulk Raj Anand, who introduced the Indian theatre to Western readers,<sup>1</sup> does not mention the Kannada theatre at all, though he dealt with the Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, Hindustani, Parsi and the Gujerathi theatres. H. N. Dasgupta, who collected and presented valuable material on the Indian stage deals at length with the Bengali theatre and drama in five volumes,<sup>2</sup> but discusses in brief the different theatres of South India. He has but one remark to make regarding the Karnatak theatre; and one wishes he had not made it. He observed: *The Kerala stage of Mysore is now making progress through the patronage of the ruling people.*<sup>3</sup> Dr. R. K. Yajnik is more considerate to the Karnatak Theatre (and more knowledgeable) when he records that the "Karnatak plays" were instrumental in bringing into existence the professional theatre of Maharashtra,<sup>4</sup> which in turn influenced the Parsi stage.<sup>5</sup> But even he does scant justice to the great artistry of the folk theatre of South Canara and the rich colourfulness of the professional theatre of North Karnatak when he observed that "the Canarese theatre is only in Mysore."<sup>6</sup> Further, Dr. Yajnik is somehow led to make the absolutely unjustifiable statement that the Kannada stage is a part and parcel of the "Madras Theatre."<sup>7</sup> It appears quite clear that the theatre of Karnatak is one of the oldest in South India, having an independent history of its own. Even the professional theatre of Karnatak seems to be older than those of the Telugu and Tamil regions. In fact, available evidences indicate that the latter were inspired into existence by the theatre of Karnatak.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Yajnik himself observed that the professional Marathi stage was the outcome of the influence of Kannada Yakṣagāna<sup>9</sup> and so, it looks strange,—his

1. Mulk Raj Anand : *The Indian Theatre* — London.

2. Hemendra Nath Dasgupta : *The Indian Stage* — 1944.

3. H. N. Dasgupta : *The Indian Stage IV* — p. 246.

4. R. K. Yajnik : *The Indian Theatre* — 1933. p. 61 and p. 92.

5. Ibid. p. 95.

6. Ibid. p. 95.

7. Ibid. p. 98 influenced evidently by Dr. Yajnik, Dr. Chandrabhargupta 'The Indian Theatre' 1954 pp. 162, observed that the 'Kanarese theatre' is a part of the 'Madras Theatre.'

8. T. Raghavachari : *The South Indian Stage*, Mysore University Magazine. 1930. p. 11.

9. R. K. Yajnik : *Op. cit.* p. 92

remark, that ' the Kanarese theatre is the youngest in South India.'<sup>1</sup>

Reasons for the lack of a correct perspective and knowledge of the Kannada stage are many but the most obvious among them deserve some consideration. Absence of territorial unity of the Kannada speaking land as to sufficiently impress on other regions of its entity was the one in question. For reasons historical, the Kannada land was till recently split under different administrations and each part had naturally imbibed the cultural and artistic patterns of the linguistic region in which it was housed. Consequently, it looked as though each part had ceased to keep pace with the other. The resultant lacking of the feeling of oneness among the Kannada people had perhaps incapacitated them from consolidating and preserving their arts including their theatre. A second reason seems to be a lack of initiative and effort among the Kannada speaking people to impress on others of their arts. When the neighbouring regions were already writing the history of their theatres, Kannada land, which inspired some of them into existence did not record the story of its theatre, nor did it see to the translation of Kannada plays into English or any other Indian languages. Other reasons like the differences in the spoken dialect in different parts of Karnatak, or the absence of a central institution to foster the theatrical art seem only the outcome of one or the other of the above mentioned fundamental causes. It is due to these handicaps, the theatre, though ancient and still alive, did not draw the attention of critics and research workers at home or abroad. It is perhaps due to these again, that the story of the theatre has in it many a missing link.

Though meagre when compared with the literary output in other regions there are evidences and reflections available regarding the theatre of Karnatak. Ancient Kannada classics and a few inscriptions throw incidental light on the theatre of their times: plays, writers and performances. Extant remnants of the Folk Theatre reflect on the glory of its past. Researches conducted by Govind Pai, T. T. Sharma, Muliya Timmappayya, D. R. Bendre and others have given a glimpse of its antiquity. Proceedings of different Drama Conferences conducted from time to time under the auspices of the Kannada Sahitya Parishat, the Amateur Dramatic Association of Bangalore, the Joladarashi Amateurs of Bellary and the Gubbi Company throw some light on the professional phase of the Karnatak Theatre. A short narrative verse

1. R. K. Yajnik: *Op. cit.* p. 101—The context suggests that the comparison is in connection with the professional theatres of different regions. While the professional theatre of Karnatak was influenced by the Marathi and Parsi performances, it is decidedly older than the Tamil and Telugu professional theatres of South India.

entitled 'Nātak' ( 1919 ) composed by Sakkri Balacharya (Shāntakavi) and the speech delivered by T. Raghavachari on 'The South Indian Stage' under the auspices of the Mysore University ( 1930 ), provide a peep into the conditions of the professional theatre. Monthly magazines like *Rangabhoomi*, *Kalā* and the quarterly *Theatre* which dedicated themselves to the cause of the theatre, provided details with regard to the Kannada professional stage. Space devoted to the theatre and its causes by journals like *Jayakarnāṭaka*, *Pariṣat Patrike*, and *Jayanti* contributed valuable material which fills some of the many gaps left in the history of the professional and amateur theatres of Karnatak.

Availing of the above-mentioned material and consulting the reminiscences of some of the playwrights and stage artists of Karnatak, an attempt is made here at providing a comprehensive survey of the theatre of Karnatak. The attempt is to treat the theme essentially from the point of view of the theatre rather than its dramatic literature. The attempt is towards a connected story of the theatre to measure its stature and indicate its rightful place among the South Indian Theatres. I am aware that much water has flown under the bridge since writing this in 1954, but still, I feel that substantively, the old conditions have persisted to prevail.

I may make a mention here that my acquaintance with the professional stage of Mysore, owing to my working as an actor in the Karnatak Natak Sabha of Sri G. V. Ramaswami Iyengar for about two years ( 1936-37 ) and later, my connection with the Students' Dramatic Association and the University Amateurs of Mysore stood me in good stead. Some of the professional actors, producers and playwrights of Karnatak whom I interviewed, and many others with whom I corresponded, readily responded. The information they gave proved valuable for this work. I thank them and particularly express my indebtedness to the late Sri C. Anandarao, the late Sri Garud Sadashivarao and to Sarvashri M. Govind Pai, A. N. Krishna Rao, T. S. Shama Rao, Betgeri Krishna Sharma, Neglur Ranganath, S. V. Parameshwara Bhatta, and Pandit C. Y. Kavali for having kept at my disposal, valuable material, published and unpublished. I am grateful to Prof. S. S. Malwad for his keen and kindly interest in this work. I am grateful to Prof. V. K. Gokak, Prof. A. N. Moorthy Rao, Sri C. S. Kanavi and Prof. Rajashekhariah for their many and valuable suggestions. I am deeply indebted to Sri M. Shankar, my colleague in All India Radio for going through this work in detail and rendering invaluable help to me in preparing the final script for the press. I feel most grateful to the Directorate General, All India Radio, for the

encouragement given to me to study the Kannada theatre and prepare this work.

Lastly, I express my gratitude to the authorities of the Karnatak University for selecting this work for publication by the University. I shall always remember the kindness shown to me by Sri D. C. Pawate the Vice-Chancellor of the Karnatak University and his foreword to this work is but another evidence of his kindness to me.

I am most thankful to Sri V. Y. Jathar of the Samyukta Karnatak Press and his staff for their patience and good work.



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# THE KARNATAK THEATRE

## I

### INTERPRETER OF THE KANNADA ART

In general, drama, the soul of the theatre, is an art that developed through times with the aid of other fine arts and therefore, it is called a collective art. It has also earned the reputation of being an ennobling art. In order to achieve its noble objective, it calls for the co-operation of Literature, Music, Painting, Sculpture and the Art of Acting which includes effective articulation and gesture. These different fine arts, while trying to maintain their own individual complexion and inspiring values, co-operate with each other in order to bring out a new creation, the drama, which could produce a happy and homogeneous total impression. Each of these arts, in its individual capacity, usually appeals to one of the senses alone, while in the collective form, all together, will produce the cumulative effect of a harmony that is at once rare and rejuvenating. Drama, therefore, has come to occupy a distinguished position among visual arts.

Love of the dramatic being inherent and instinctive, the theatre is a universal institution and it has passed through almost the same stages in its development in all countries. This being the general basis, it could be said that the Kannada land must have had a definite and even independent form of a theatre of its own. Immaterial whether it is independently evolved or is the result of a beautiful blending of salient components borrowed, one could mark the existence of a theatre which can be exclusively recognised as the theatre of Karnatak.

During the last about hundred years, the theatre of Karnatak seems to have stood in relief as an independent and generous institution of art. As a potent living influence, it also seems to have inspired into existence theatres of neighbouring regions like that of Maharashtra, Andhra and Tamil Nad, providing them with its own theatrical modes and methods.

#### MAHARASHTRA :

The professional theatre of Maharashtra which celebrated its centenary a decade ago, seems to have drawn its inspiration from the

folk-modes of the Kannada stage, for troupes of the folk artists of North Karnatak which were frequently visiting important places in Maharashtra drew the attention of the region. The Yakshagāna troupe of Kirki (North Kanara) which visited Sangli in 1842 on the invitation of its Chief, Srimant Appa Saheb Patwardhan, impressed the Raja and the people so much that they considered it desirable to model the Marathi stage on the performances of the Kannada Yakshagāna<sup>1</sup> in order to make it more sustaining than the prevailing folk-patterns of 'Tamāshā' and 'Lalit'. Vishnupant Bhave, a 'gifted clerk' of the Raja of Sangli, under instructions from his Chief, wrote his first play *Seeta Swayamvara* possibly before 1845. Encouraged by its success, Bhave wrote 'many more' plays in Marathi *exactly* on the pattern set by the Kannada Yakshagāna and staged them in Bombay in 1852.

"Their typical play was much admired by the Governor's Secretary. Religious spirit, 'scientific' singing by a sort of 'chorus' in the midst of dialogue by other characters, crude dances and quaint costumes and make-up and certain skilful sword play were their outstanding qualities. With all their defects, Bhave's pauranic productions had a fixed system, some dignity and intense musical charm." <sup>2</sup>

Even in the details of production, the Bhave performances closely resembled the present Yakshagāna:

"Nearly from the beginning to the end he (*Sutradhāra*) had to stay on the stage. At his invocation the blessing of the elephant-headed god Ganapati was exhorted and also of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. . . . . Most of the singing was done by the *Sutradhāra* and it was his duty to introduce to the public in some way or the other the actor who entered the stage." <sup>3</sup>

Very soon Bhave came to be imitated.

"The first company was that of Vishnupant Bhave. The idea was picked up by many and shortly afterwards new companies were floated in towns around Sangli. . . . All these companies used to stage only mythological dramas and the nature of the perfor-

1. A fuller account is provided by Shri. Muliya Timmappayya. : *Parti Subba* p. 123. An idol of 'Krishna' said to have been presented by the Sangli Chief to the troupe at that time is still preserved by the Hasyagar family of Kirki.

2. A V Kulkarni : *Marathi Rangabhoomi* quoted by R. K. Yajnik, *The Indian Theatre* p. 93.

3 H N. Dasgupta : *Op cit.* Vol III, p. 196.

mances was also similar....All these companies used to have only one curtain....”<sup>1</sup>

But soon, innovations were introduced by Maharashtra. The performance was remodelled and revitalised. Shāntakavi, one of the first Kannada playwrights of the late 19th century, summed up the innovations introduced by Maharashtra into the Kannada Bhāgawata performances. He said that they introduced a number of modern musical instruments, musical interludes between the scenes, curtains, scenery, sword fight and some new characters.<sup>2</sup> Later in 1878-79, Anna Kirloskar of Gurlhosur (Belgaum Dist.) who was conversant with Kannada opened a new era on the stage of Maharashtra by translating into Marathi *Shākuntala* of Kalidasa. His translation is said to have been inspired by the Kannada version of *Shākuntala* done in 1869 by his friend, Churamuri Seshagirirao. Anna Kirloskar, in addition, borrowed for his *Shākuntala* tunes from the *Jāvadi*, *Krishna Pārijāta* and *Dāsara pada* of Karnatak, as is acknowledged by him in the first prints of his plays.<sup>3</sup> Coupled with munificent royal patronage, the Marathi stage grew into full stature by 1880, creating a vogue so impressive and influential that the commercial stage of North Karnatak accepted it as a model to copy. It is but natural that the glory of the Marathi stage made people almost completely lose sight of its original contact with the folk theatre of Karnatak.

#### ANDHRA :

The Kannada theatre exerted a similar influence on the professional stage of Andhra. About three decades ago, Sri T. Raghavachari, the eminent stage artist of Karnatak and Andhra observed:—

“In the Telugu speaking countries there was no theatre fifty years ago in the sense in which we understand the term today....

1. *Ibid.* Vol. III, p. 202.

2. ನೆರೆ ಮಹಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರದವರೇ ಭಾಗವತರ ಮಾ  
ದರಿಗಳಂ ಕೊಂಡವುಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ನಸುತಿದ್ದು ಪಡೆ  
ವೆರಸಿ, ತಬಲಾ, ಝಂಜಿ, ಸೀನು, ಪಡದಾ, ವಿದೂಷಕ, ಸೂತ್ರಧಾರ ಮೇಣ  
ಕರಿವದನ, ಶಾರದಾಗಮನ, ಮಧ್ಯಮಗಾನ  
ಕರವಾಳಗಳ ತಿರುಪು, ನಯದ ಪೆಣ್ಣುಸೋಗು ಹಂ  
ದರ ಥಿಯೇಟರುಗಳೊಡನಾಡಿ ನಾಟಕವೆಂದು ಗಳಿಸಿದರಾ ದ್ರವ್ಯವನ್ನು

ಶಾಂತಕವಿ. 'ನಾಟಕ' ಪ್ರಭಾತ ಮಾಸಪತ್ರಿಕೆ ಧಾರವಾಡ, ಮಾರ್ಚ್ ೧೯೧೯, ಪುಟ ೧-೮.

3. Sri. Huilgol Narayanrao in *Rangabhoomi* Oct. 1925, and also the Introduction by Sri. Mudavidu Krishnarao to Churamuri's *Shākuntala* (1934).

only there were a few groups of players called *Bhāgavataluvāru* (synonymous with the *Bhāgavata* of Yakshagāna in Karnatak) who visited important centres and exhibited in actions and dialogues a few incidents from Sri Krishna's life as described in *Sri Bhāgavatam* . . . the actors were not more than four or five, the dialogue was long and burdened with innumerable verses and songs which were explained in prose." <sup>1</sup>

The description at once reminds us of Yakshagāna which is now accepted to belong essentially to the Karnatak folk stage.

The credit of writing the first Telugu drama must go to Sri D. Krishnamacharlu of Bellary who later came to be hailed as *Āndhranāṭaka pitāmaha*. It is interesting to note that he wrote his first play *Swapna Aniruddha* in Kannada stating in the preface of the play, that though he was not proficient in the Kannada language or literature, he was obliged to write out his first drama in Kannada as his friends expressed the opinion that Kannada was the *only* language suitable for the stage. This indicates the influence of an already flourishing Kannada theatre. It is a fact, however, that the 'Rangāchārḷu Nāṭak Company' and the 'Shākuntala Karnāṭaka Nāṭak Sabhā', both of Mysore, had paid a number of visits to Bellary early in 1880. Sri Krishnamacharlu might have seen their performances at Bellary. The description indicates again that the literary merit of the Kannada drama was highly impressive as early as 1880.

Dr. Narayana Rao, while tracing the relation between the theatres of Karnatak and Andhra, observed that an enthusiastic troupe of Dharwar went out to stage plays in Andhra in the year 1884 and "captured the country with their specialised technique of production and thus inspired the theatre of Andhra."<sup>2</sup> This troupe was obviously the *Tantupurastha Nāṭaka Mandali* of Dharwar, referred to by Mudavidu Krishnarao as having toured Maharashtra, Gujarat, Vidarbha, Madhya Bharat and Andhra under the leadership of Bhimacharya Eri and Gopinath Joshi.<sup>3</sup>

#### TAMILNAD:

The theatre of Tamilnad had an active folk stage. Its performances called *Terukkuttam*—very similar in nature to the Kannada

1. T. Raghavachari: *The South Indian Stage*: Mysore University Magazine June 1930. p. 10.
2. Dr. C. Narayana Rao: *Influence of Karnatak on Andhra Stage, Kannada Stage Centenary*. Vol. (1948) p. 111.
3. Mudavidu Krishna Rao in *Jayakarnataka* of 8th Nov. 1934. pp. 30-33.

Yakshagāna— were frequently staged, particularly on festive occasions like 'Pongal'. "One of the most ancient and fascinating stories acted on the stage for centuries is that of *Nalatangi*." <sup>1</sup> As early as in the eleventh century, a Chola king (Rajaraja I) "built a beautiful Shaiva temple in his own name and instituted a dramatic troupe which had to enact regularly every year the *Rājarāja Nāṭaka*." <sup>2</sup> Similarly the temple has always remained the platform for the Yakshagāna performances in the coastal tract of Karnatak and every temple is invariably associated with a troupe of Yakshagāna artists.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest written form of the drama in Tamilnad, was called *Nāḍagam* but as V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar clarified, the name did not suggest any written form of the drama as is understood today. It was only a *Kāvya* or *Prabandha* like the Kannada Yakshagāna, having a string of verses with no written dialogue.<sup>4</sup> The very first written drama in the current sense of the term was written and staged in Tamilnad by Govindaswamiraja who is said to have stayed in Karnatak for a long time. His play contained a number of compositions in Sanskrit. The real inauguration of the Tamil theatre was made by Bellary Krishnamacharya, author of *Swapna Aniruddha* and father of the Telugu drama who went in about 1883 to Tamilnad with his troupe "Sarasa Vinodini Nataka Mandali" and staged a number of plays in Telugu. These plays were enthusiastically received and Sri. Sambandham, the "Father of the Tamil Drama" who, inspired by these performances, started writing plays in Tamil. Salient features of the Kannada theatre were thus carried by the Telugu stage to bring into existence the Tamil drama. It is evident, therefore, that at least to start with, and during their early career, the professional theatres of Maharashtra, Andhra and Tamilnad owe considerably to the theatre of Karnatak.<sup>5</sup> After 1880, during the professional phase up to about 1940, a close contact was maintained by the regional theatres of these different languages. Professional troupes freely visited the regions of one another with mutual influence on the modes of presentation and

1. T. Raghavachari. *Op. cit.* p. 11.
2. R. K. Yajnik; *The Indian Theatre*. pp. 61-62.
3. Most prominent among them today is the Manjunatha temple of Dharmasthala, patron of the well known troupe of K. Vittalashastri—the Manjunatha Yakshanataka Mandali.
4. V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar: *The Tamil Stage : Kannada Stage Centenary Vol.* p. 115.
5. *Ibid* p. 116

exchanged dramatic themes. The theatre of Karnatak, which had originally supplied the *elan vital* to the theatres of other regions, later received from them specialised patterns of presentation with stage music, scenery, settings and refined methods of acting.

In order to have at least an approximate estimate of the Karnatak theatre which spurred others into activity, it would perhaps be desirable from the point of view of an academic study to divide the Kannada land into three main parts wherein the theatre manifested itself in different branches. These divisions would be what previously were known as Bombay Karnatak (North Karnatak) Madras Karnatak (South Kanara) and Mysore. Though these divisions are too limited to cover the entire Kannada speaking area, they could be accepted as it is mostly under these divisions that the growth of the Karnatak theatre could be traced with distinct and almost independent features. The theatre seems to have developed differently in its three branches cited above, owing to the dictation of different climatic and geographical environments, inevitable contact with the art and culture of the particular division and also action and inter-action with the language, culture and arts of the respective neighbouring region like Maharashtra, Andhra, Tamilnad or Kerala. North Kanara and South Kanara virtually form one continuous stretch of land and remained even administratively undivided until 1862. From the point of view of the evolution of the theatrical art, the entire coastal tract could be reckoned as one region, which evolved the indigenous folk mode of the famed dance-drama, Yakshagāna. The eastern plains formed another tract of land with a totally different environment which originated the professional theatre and nursed it into great prosperity. Thirdly, the table-land of Mysore evolved its own theatre, which sprang into existence on account of royal patronage.

Thus, the theatre of Karnatak remained a potent institution of art in its three branches developed in the three different regions of the land. It included different phases like the folk, the professional and the modern amateur theatres. In modern times, its growth strikes one as direct and conspicuous. Its independent characteristics indicate its being an indigenous institution with an antiquity of its own.

## II

### ANTIQUITY

Karnatak has a bountiful flow of literature and Kannada classics, from the time of *Kavirājamārga* of Nripatunga of the 9th century A.D., indicate from time to time the existence of an active theatre in the Kannada speaking land, and what is more, they indicate, also, a growth of the theatre in two branches—one at the court under royal patronage and the second, flourishing among the common people, mostly perhaps in the country-side. Occasionally, these literary indications get the support of epigraphical evidences and the two together act as the main source of evidence for building up the biography of the Kannada theatre. A march into the past would reveal the important milestones of literary and epigraphical evidences.

#### THE COURT THEATRE:

Going back to the history of the Karnatak theatre—especially of the court theatre—it is noted that the earliest available written play belonged to the last phase of the 17th century A. D. It is *Mitravinda Govinda* (1680 A. D.) written by Narasingararya, popularly known as Singararya or Singarya, a court poet under the patronage of King Chikka Devaraja of Mysore (1672–1704). He was a nephew of Tirumalarya, a friend and minister of the king. *Mitravinda Govinda* is an adaptation of the Sanskrit play *Ratnavali* of Harsha. Deviations from the original are not found in the theme or development of the play, but in its characters. Instead of the lofty but mortal Udayana, the hero of the original, the immortal Krishna is made the hero in the Kannada version, perhaps in identity with the patron Chikka Devaraja—as suggested by Sri D. R. Bendre.<sup>1</sup> With regard to other aspects like the movement and impression *Mitravinda Govinda* follows the Sanskrit original very closely and remains almost its replica. Apart from this play which is said to have been staged at the Mysore palace there is no earlier drama yet discovered, be it original or translation.<sup>2</sup>

1. D. R. Bendre; *Kannada Nāṭakada Prārambha Kāla*: 'Jayanti' Sept. 1950.
2. The earliest available play in Marathi, *Sri Lakshminarayana Kalyānam* dated 1690 discovered in Tanjore by V. K. Rajwade, is said to have contained a number of Kannada and Telugu words (Hinge, Taru, Baru etc.) and some instructions also in Telugu, which prompted scholars to ponder over the possibility of the play having been first staged by Kannadigas, or Telugas, : V. P. Dandekar; *Marathi Nāṭya Śrīṣṭi* p. 17.

This however cannot lead to the conclusion that there was no theatre in Karnatak before 1700 A. D. : there are adequate references in Kannada classics to the existence of *Nāṭaka*.

Examined independently—without viewing it as a translation, *Mitravinda* written in old Kannada with frequent 'Kanda', 'Padya' and 'Akshara Gana Vritta' suggests that the language was fairly well adapted for dramatic expression. If it was the very first play ever attempted in Kannada, the dramatic technique and language would not have given an impression of self-development. The inference that there may have been earlier Kannada plays is supported by a verse in *Shabdānushāsana* (1604) of Bhattākālanka, which mentioned the existence of 'works of Kāvya, *Nāṭaka*, Alankāra and Kalāshāstra' in Kannada (*Bhāṣhakṛitānām*).<sup>1</sup> This statement of Bhattākālanka supports the inference that there *must* have been some plays and also other dramatic literature in Kannada far earlier than the 17th century.

#### NATAKA SHĀLE:

A number of references—literary and epigraphical—are found from time to time to the 'Nāṭaka Shāle', possibly a decorated hall specially erected for performances of 'Nāṭaka'. *Keladinripa Vijaya* (1763) of Linganna mentions that one such was constructed by king Venkatappa Nayaka of Keladi (1582-1629) in his palace at Ikkeri—a 'Nāṭaka Shāle' which was full of highly skilful architectural patterns.<sup>2</sup> Almost at the same time the Mysore palace also had a 'Nāṭaka Shāle' as mentioned by Govind Vaidya, author of *Kantirava Narasārāja Vijaya* (Jyēṣṭha 1648) and a 'court poet of king Kantirava Narasārāj of Mysore (1638-1659). There were *Bharatāchāryas* who were possibly the exponents of Bharatanāṭya and experts in *Nāṭya śāstra* in the Mysore court as suggested by the poet. About a hundred years before this, at the times of the decline of Vijayanagar, Ratnākara Siddha, a prominent poet of South Karnatak and author of *Bharatesha Vaibhava* (1577 A. D.), gave a grand picture of the Nāṭaka Shāle wherein, his unearthly hero Bharata, witnessed stage-performances. We also notice the Imperial Palace of Vijayanagar

1. ಶಬ್ದಾಗಮ ಯುಕ್ತಾಗಮ ಮಮಗಮ ವಿವಯಾಣಾಂ ತಥಾ  
ಕಾವ್ಯನಾಟಕಾಂಕಾರಕಲಾಶಾಸ್ತ್ರವಿವಯಾಣಾಂ ಚ ಬಹುನಾಂ  
ಗ್ರಂಥಾನಾಮಪಿ ಭಾಷಾಕೃತಾನಾಮುಪಲಬ್ಧಮಾನತ್ವಾತ್ ॥

2. .. ಇಕ್ಕೇರಿಯರಮನೆಯೊಳಗೆ ಚಿತ್ರಕರ ರಚನಾಕೃಶಲ್ಯದಿಂ ನಾಟಕಶಾಲೆಯೊಂ ನಿರ್ಮಾಣ  
ಗೆಯ್ಯದನು..... —*Keladinripa Vijaya* I—Prose after the 29th verse.

having a *Pattada Nāṭaka Shāle* evidently a Royal theatre,<sup>1</sup> and the provincial palaces at Tanjore and Ikkeri boasting of theatres 'adorned with gems of all kinds'.<sup>2</sup> The earliest tangible evidence to the existence of the *Nāṭaka Shāle* is provided by the Mugud inscription, a stone-slab standing to this day at the village Mugud, close to Dharwar, which records the construction of a '*Nāṭaka Shāle*' by *Shrimanmahāsāmanta* Mārtandayya. The inscription is dated 1045 A. D.<sup>3</sup> These references to '*Nāṭakashāle*' indicate a flourishing theatrical activity in Karnatak from the 10th century A.D. Now, the question would be as to what kind of theatrical performances these were.

#### NĀṬAKA :

A description of the performance of '*Nāṭaka*' given by Govinda Vaidya suggests that it was clearly a theme-dance, a *nāṭya*, or at best, a *nāṭya-nāṭaka* as Shri Bendre put it, but not '*nāṭaka*' in the sense the word is understood today. Ratnakara Siddha also used words like *Nāṭaka Shāle*, *Poorva Nāṭaka Sandhi*, *Uttara Nāṭaka Sandhi* and *Nāṭaka* in his work, but actually, his descriptions of the gorgeous performances suggest that they were essentially *dramatic dances* like the *Dikkannikā nāṭya* and *Jalakannikā nāṭya* performed by '*ganikā*' or maiden dancers. A *Sūtradhāra* with cymbals in his hands accompanied the dancers during the performance. The performance itself was full of dance, music and acting, devoid of the spoken word. Like the *Nāṭaka paṇḍita* mentioned in the *Basava Purāṇa*,<sup>4</sup> the '*Sūtradhāra*' of *Ihara-teśa Vaibhava* was perhaps an expert in the art and science of *Nāṭya* and was inevitable during a performance. Sri Muliya Timmappayya identified him with the *Bhāgavata* of Kannada *Bayalata*;<sup>5</sup> but, Prof. K. G. Kundanagar was perhaps more correct when he identified the performance itself with the '*Kathakali*' of Kerala more than with the *Bayalāṭa* of Karnatak.<sup>6</sup> Though his beautiful description of the perfor-

1. B. A. Saletore : *Social and Political history of the Vijayanagara Empire*. Vol. II, p. 397 8.

2. Ibid. p. 416.

3. ಪ್ರೀಮಸ್ವರೂಪಸಾಹಸ್ರಂ ಮಾರ್ತಾಂಡಯ್ಯಃ ತಪ್ಪ ಮುತ್ರಯ್ಯಂ ಮಾಡಿಸಿದ ಬಸವಿಯಂ ಪಡಿಸಲಿಸಿ ನಾಟಕಶಾಲೆಯಂ ಮಾಡಿಸಿ ತನ್ನ ಕೀರ್ತಿಶಿಖರಸ್ತಂಭಮಂ ಆಚಂದ್ರಾರ್ಕತಾರಂಬರಂ ನಿಲಿಸಿದ.

—Bombay Karnatak Inscriptions. Vol. I. Part I. p. 78.

4. Basava Purāṇa - LIX - 27.

5. Muliya Timmappayya : *Pancha Kajjāga*, 1927-p. 45.

6. K. G. Kundanagar : *Kannada Sāhityadalli Sangeeta Nritya Kalegalu*; Pari-shat Patrike, Vol. XXIV. 3. p. 242.

mances suggested only theme dances without the spoken word in it, some other references of Ratnakara Siddha seem to provide clues to the existence of written dramas, a reference like “one could be lulled to sleep with *Āgama*, *Kāvya* and *Nāṭaka*”<sup>1</sup> or another in the *Uttara Nāṭaka Sandhi* that referred to the curtain that was lowered step by step to be ultimately dropped by the dancers when they revealed themselves, showered flowers from their hands and began to dance. The latter picture is full of significance as it is in tune with the tradition followed in the Yakshagāna and Bayalāṭa performances even to this day, particularly while revealing the leading roles to the audience for the first time.

#### NATYA AND NATAKA :

Usage of the word ‘nāṭaka’ in Kannada to suggest what seems to be a theme-dance devoid of the spoken word deserves some consideration at this stage, for the question would be as to why the ‘Hall of Entertainment’ was named a ‘Nāṭaka shāle’ and not ‘Nāṭya shāle’ though it was nothing other than a *nāṭya* that was performed there; a *nāṭya* with its predominance to *nrīya* and *abhinaya*. This calls for an accurate definition of the word ‘nāṭaka’ and its relation to the word ‘nāṭya’.

A definition of the term ‘nāṭaka’, was provided by Abhinava Mangarāja, author of the lexical work in verse — *Abhinavābhīdāna* (1378). According to Mangarāja—“The Performance would be called a *nāṭaka* when *nrīya* was performed in the method of *hastāṅga* and *dr̥ṣṭi-gati*.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, when the art of gesture of *hastā* (hand) *āṅga* (limb) and *dr̥ṣṭi* (movement of the eyes) was successfully employed in a dance, then it would go under the name *nāṭaka*.

In the light of this definition, the court performances of ‘nāṭaka’ were virtually theme dances obviously full of music—and perhaps without prose-dialogues in them—like the *Jalakannika Nāṭya* and *Dikkannika nāṭya* mentioned in the *Bharatesha Vaibhava*.<sup>3</sup> The defini-

1. ಆಗಮ ಕಾವ್ಯನಾಟಕದೊಳೆಲ್ಲರ ತಲೆ-

ದೂಗಿ ಮಲಗಿಸಬಹುದು.

—ಭರತೇಶ ವೈಭವ : ಭೋಗವಿಜಯ : ಕವಿವಾಕ್ಯಸಂಧಿ ( ಪುಟ ೧೭ ).

2. ನೃತ್ಯದೊಳು ಹಸ್ತಾಂಗ ದೃಷ್ಟಿಗತಿ ಪದ್ಧತಿಯೊಳಾಡೆ ನಾಟಕಮೆನಿಕ್ಕುಂ.

*Abhinavābhīdāna* of Mangarāja edited by M. Mariyappa Bhat 1952. p. 25. The word ‘āde’ is rather intriguing, for in accordance with the context of usage, it changes the complexion of its meaning to suggest ‘playing’ ‘acting’ and also ‘talking’. In the present context however, it would be more appropriate to take it to mean ‘while acting’ or ‘while playing.’

3. —*Bharatesha Vaibhava* – *Uttara Nataka Sandhi* : Sangatya 157-160.

tion of Mangarāja seems to get some support from the evidence of earlier writers like Kavikāmadeva of the 12th century and Ādipampa of the early 10th century. *Basava Purāṇa* ( 1369 A. D. ) of Bhimakavi provides an elaborate description of costumes and decorations worn by Somaladevi who came prepared to take part in a nāṭaka. This description agrees in detail with the make up and costumes of only a dancer<sup>1</sup> Kavikāmadeva while priding on his work *Śringara Ratnākara* and advising the ambitious to read it for profit, obviously placed a particular emphasis on *abhinaya* in nāṭaka.<sup>2</sup>

The supposition of Sri Muliye Timmappayya that the relevant verse of Kāmadeva bore an advice to the playwright writing in *Kannada* is worth noting.<sup>3</sup> Ādipampa provided yet another definition of the word nāṭaka which throws some light on the import of the term at his times. According to him, *anukarāṇa* or imitation would make a nāṭaka. To him, nāṭaka is the art of imitation.<sup>4</sup> It would be difficult to say if this *anukarāṇa* was only in gesture or whether it included the spoken word; and if it ever did, it would suggest the existence of prose plays. But Pampa used the word Nāṭaka in another context while describing a virtual dance like the one performed by Neelanjane, a celestial dancer who came to charm Purudeva with her unequalled art of nāṭaka which reflected a million delicate shades.<sup>5</sup> This description makes it clear that Pampa had nothing but a theme-dance to go by the name nāṭaka.

1. ಇಟ್ಟು ಜಡ ಬೊಲ್ಗೆ ಹವಮರ್ದಿದೆ  
ತೊಟ್ಟ ಕಂಚುಕಮಂದುಕೂಲವ  
ನುಟ್ಟು ಚಲ್ಲಣಮಂ ರಚಿಸಿ ಮಣಿಬಚಿತ ಸಿಂಚಿನಿಯ  
ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೊಂಡು ಬೆಡಂಗಡರೆ ನೆರೆ  
ದಿಟ್ಟ ನೀನೀ ನಾಟಕಕ್ಕಳ  
ವಟ್ಟು ರೀತಿಯೊಳೊಪ್ಪಿ ಸೋಮಲದೇವಿ ನಡತಾರೆ. || ಬಸವಪುರಾಣ, XII ೪೨.
2. ಇದನ್ನೋದಿ ತಿಳಿದ ಕವಿ ಮೆಚಿ<sup>3</sup>  
ವುದು ಪೇಳ್ವಭಿನಯಿಸಿ ನಾಟಕಂಗಳನಂತುಂ  
ಪದೆದೊಡ ಬರ್ಕುಮೆ ಕಣ್ಣಿ  
ಲ್ಲದೆಯುಂ ಬಗೆದೆಗದರೊಳದೆ ವರ್ಣಕ್ರಮಮುಂ. III. 92.

— *Sangeetaratnākara* Edited by S. G. Narasimhaachar—1898.

3. M. Timmappayya; *Kannada Nalū, Desi Sāhityavē* p. 53.

4. " .... ತಾನುಮಾನಂದ ನಾಟಕೆ ಮಾಡಲ್ಪಗೆದು ಕೃತಾನುಕರಣಮೊ  
ನಾಟಕಮಪ್ಪುದರಿಂ ಭಗವಜ್ಞ ನ್ಯಾಭಿಷೇಕ ಸಂಬಂಧಿಯಾಗೆ. .... "

— ಆದಿಪುರಾಣ ೭ನೆಯ ಅಶ್ವಾಸ

5. ಕೋಟಿತರದಿಂದಮೆಸೆವೀ ನಾಟಕಮಂ ತೋರೆ ಮಾಣ್ಣಿಳ್ಳಿಲ್ಲಳೊ ಬಗೆಯೊಳ್  
ನಾಟುವಿನಮಮರಿ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿ ನಾಟಕಮುಮನೆನೆಗೆ ನೆರೆತೋರಿದಳಿಗಳೊ.

— ಆದಿಪುರಾಣ ೯ನೆಯ ಅಶ್ವಾಸ ೪೫

Thus, it becomes evident that Mangaraja's definition of 'nāṭaka' as a theme-dance with a finished technique of gesture gets support from earlier writers also. This import of the word 'nāṭaka' must have remained the same for years before the times of Ādipampa. There is, thus, a conspicuous absence of written drama in ancient Karnatak in spite of literary references to the term 'nāṭaka'. Court-performances of 'nāṭaka' were then essentially *theme-dances* fully supported by acting to resemble, as Prof Kundangar suggested, the present 'kathakali' performance. It should have been a form of Yakshagāna with all its paraphernalia, music and dance but devoid of the spoken-word. It was perhaps the fashion of the court with its 'high brow' audiences to treat themselves to this form of a 'dignified and symbolic dance-drama' commonly called 'Nāṭaka,' to distinguish it from the folk performances, perhaps recognised by the name *āṭa*.

#### PROSE PLAYS:

*Sanskrit*: It is now for consideration as to whether there was no prose-play at all in ancient Karnatak. Bhattakalanka of the early 17th century makes a mention of its existence. Many an evidence provided by the history of Vijayanagar and also by ancient classics of Karnatak substantiates the possibility of the existence of prose drama—both in Sanskrit and in Kannada.

The Imperial Palace of Vijayanagar had a royal theatre (*Paṭṭada nāṭaka shāle*) wherein 'nāṭaka' was staged. A play by name *Jāmbavati Kalyāṇam* was written in Sanskrit by king Krishnadevaraya, himself a great patron of letters and art. The play was enacted for the people who had assembled to witness the Chaitra festival of God Virūpāksha.<sup>1</sup>

The court of Vijayanagar possibly had a band of expert artists also. Sri. Saletore observed that:

"*Gangādāsa Pratāpa Vilasam* of Gangadhara (at the times of Mallikarjunaraja) mentions that an actor of the court of Vijayanagara, on hearing that prince Gangadasa was in need of a proper person to stage the new drama....proposed to go to the court of that ruler. The farce in two acts entitled *Dhurta Samāgama Prahasana* of Jyotireeshwara Kavi Vebarācharya (mostly, a humorous play possibly written in Sanskrit as suggested by the title) must also have been staged in Vijayanagara during

1. B. A. Saletore : *Social and Political life in the Vijayanagar Empire II* p. 397.

the reign of Saluva Narasimharaya (1478). The theatrical world was considerably benefited by *Kaladeepika* of Saluva Gopa Tipa Bhoopala.”<sup>1</sup>

Even the provincial courts of the Vijayanagar empire had their own theatres. Tanjore had a beautiful theatre adorned with gems. Ikkeri also had one in the times of Sankanna Nāyaka, a Sāmanta.<sup>2</sup>

These evidences support the existence of written plays, mostly in Sanskrit, containing prose-dialogues. They were frequently staged in the ‘nāṭaka shāle’ itself, perhaps along with the more popular ‘dance dramas’ called ‘nāṭaka’. This leads to the inference that there were two types of ‘nāṭaka’ one with prose dialogue and the other without it, and also, that the ones with prose dialogue were plays fully influenced by Sanskrit drama. It is not improbable that in the royal courts of ancient Karnatak, Sanskrit plays were staged occasionally if not frequently. *Jāmbhavatī Kalyāṇam* is an evidence in support of the inference.

But then, the question is regarding the existence of prose plays in Kannada. There are evidences indicating the existence of Kannada plays which seem to be mostly translated from Sanskrit. Ancient Kannada works (*kāvya*) show a close affinity to Sanskrit literature, and by the times of Nripatunga (9th century A. D.), writers in Sanskrit seem to have been accepted as models to copy. Sanskrit literature gave predominance to its drama (*Kāvyēṣu nāṭakam ramyam*), and eminent playwrights like Bhāsa and Kālidāsa must have impressed on the times with their craft and skill. It is possible that the Kannada writers of those times persuaded themselves simply to translate into Kannada the then available Sanskrit plays. That the *Nāṭya Shāstra* of Bharata was held in high esteem as the ultimate authority on the science and art of dramaturgy is made evident by Ādipampa (10th century A. D.) who, in his *Vikramārjuna Vijaya*, mentioned that the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas were given lessons in the *Nāṭya Shāstra*.<sup>3</sup> It was perhaps the fashion of the times to fall back on the Sanskrit literature and to translate some of its well known works into Kannada. Though unfortunately, full texts of such translations are not available, there are a few hints

1. Ibid. p. 415.

2. Ibid. p. 416.

3. ಬಾಂಡವರೂ ಕೌರವರೂ ಸಕಲ ವೇದ ಶಾಸ್ತ್ರಗಳಲ್ಲಿಯೂ “....ಭರತ ಪ್ರಣೀತ ನೃತ್ಯಶಾಸ್ತ್ರ ದೊಳಂ ನಾರದಾದಿ ಪ್ರಣೀತ ಗಾಂಧರ್ವ ವಿಷ್ಣುವಿಶ್ವಂಗಳಲ್ಲಿಯೂ...” ಪರಿಣತಿ ಹೊಂದಿದರು. *Vikramārjuna Vijaya*. Edited by B. Venkatanaranappa 1926, p. 47. This reference of Ādipampa would of course place *Nāṭya Shāstra* at a time earlier than that of *Mahābhārata* itself but the reference reflects on the notions and beliefs of the times of Pampa.

regarding their existence, and, *Prabodha Chandra* is belived to be one such translation into Kannada from Sanskrit.

Keshiraja, an acclaimed grammarian and author of *Shabdamanī Darpaṇa* ( 1260 A. D. ), in a verse, while mentioning his literary compositions, records the title *Prabodha Chandra*<sup>1</sup> along with *Cholapālaka Charitam*, *Srichitramāle*, *Subhadra Haraṇa* and *Kirāta*. These works are believed to be in Kannada and while *Cholapālaka Charitam* and *Srichitramāle* might be Champoo kavya in tune with the tradition of the times, Sri Govind Pai considers that *Subhadra Haraṇa* and *Prabodha Chandra* might have been prose-plays.<sup>2</sup> *Prabodha Chandra* in particular, as he suggests, may have been the Kannada version of the earlier Sanskrit play *Prabodha Chandrodaya* written by Krishnamisra Yati ( 11th century ). If it is accepted that *Prabodha Chandra* of Keshiraja was the translation of an earlier Sanskrit play, it would bear eloquent evidence to the relish shown to translating well known Sanskrit plays into Kannada and also to the possibility of the Kannada stage of the 13th century having both Sanskrit and Kannada plays.

Like *Prabodha Chandra*, many an other well known Sanskrit play might have been translated into Kannada. Though full texts of such translations are not obtained, some of the verses thus translated yet remain. In *Kāvyaśāloka* of Nāgavarma II ( 1145 A.D. ), the Kannada version of a verse in *Vikramorvaśīya* of Kalidasa ( Act I – verse 3 ), translated verses from the *Nāgānanda* of Harṣha and the *Mālati Mādhava* of Bhavabhūti are found.<sup>3</sup> That these, and particularly, the verse of Bhavabhūti formed part of Kannada versions of the original Sanskrit plays is made clear in *Chhandonushāsana* of Jayakeerti ( 900 A.D. according to Sri Pai ) where a reference is made to that end: *Pratitham Karnāt Mālati Mādhava Prabhr̥ti Kāvye*.<sup>4</sup> ‘The word *Kāvya* here is supposed to mean a ‘nāṭaka’ as suggested by Sri. Govinda Pai,<sup>5</sup> for the obvious reason that the original in Sanskrit is a drama and the verse translated into Kannada is as if spoken by

1. ಮೊರೆವಡೆವ ಚೋಳ ಪಾಲಕ  
ಚರಿತಂ ಶ್ರೀ ಚಿತ್ರಮಾಲೆಯಂತೆ ಸುಭದ್ರಾ,  
ಪರಣಂ ಪ್ರಬೋಧ ಚಂದ್ರಂ  
ಕಿರಾತಮವು ಕೇರಿರಾಜ ಕವಿ ಚರಿತಂಗಳ್.

2. M. Govind Pai. *Kannada Nāṭakada Halame*. Stage Centenary. Vol. II, p. 12.

3. These translated verses are quoted in full by Sri Govinda Pai in his article ‘Kannada Nāṭakada Halame’: *Op. cit.* p. 14.

4. ಪ್ರತಿಥಂ ಕರ್ನಾಡ ಮಾಲತಿ ಮಾಧವ ಪ್ರಭೃತಿ ಕಾವ್ಯೇ ।

—*Chhandonushāsana* VII-6 last line.

5. M. Govinda Pai. *Op. cit.* p. 15.

the character in the first person.<sup>1</sup> The Sanskrit *Kāvya* always included *nāṭaka*.

It is thus noticed that by the 10th century A.D., plays were possibly rendered into Kannada from Sanskrit and that *Nāṭya Shāstra* was held in high esteem. The word 'nāṭaka' was freely used and its significance was fully understood. Though there is no tangible evidence to confirm that the Kannada versions of Sanskrit plays were *staged*, it cannot be concluded that they were translated for the sake of mere reading. Drama has always been a *Drśya Kāvya* and the best method of serving a play was by staging it. If ever they staged those Kannada versions of Sanskrit plays, or in general, the 'nāṭaka' in whatever form extant in those times, it would mean keeping the Kannada theatre alive.

The inference that the post tenth century period had a flourishing Kannada Stage is substantiated by a few references of that time when Karnatak reaped a rich harvest of merited literature. Pampa, Ponna and Ranna who reigned the literary scene of the 10th century A. D. by contributing *Champoo Kavya* perhaps resisted the drama-form lest they be only the imitators of their stalwart predecessors in the Sanskrit literature. Yet their classics do contain in parts, a pronounced dramatic element. They freely used the word *nāṭaka*. The dance of Neelanjane is described as a *nāṭaka* by Pampa in his *Ādipurāṇa* ( IX-45 ). Ponna compared the moon-rise to the opening of a dramatic performance.<sup>2</sup> In the words of Shri K. G. Kundanagar,

" . . . . He compares the stars to flowers scattered by him ( Sūtradhāra ) on the stage; he compares the receding darkness to the up-going curtains; and he compares the four divisions of the night to the four acts of the drama. "<sup>3</sup>

Ranna, the third giant of the great trio, made a mention of a *Nāṭaka Vidhi* in his *Ajita Purāṇa*.<sup>4</sup> He also brought essentially dramatic characters in his *Sāhasa Bheema Vijaya* like Kanchuki ( *Aswasa* 1 and 2 ) and *Vidūṣaka* ( *Aswasa* 2 ) and made them appear though not warranted by the situation. It is surmised by scholars that Ranna had the drama-form in mind while setting to writing his

1. *Ibid.* p. 15.

2. *Shānti Purana* : VIII - 71.

3. K. G. Kundanagar; '*Development of Kannada Drama*'

J. B. B. R. A. S. — IV — 12. 313.

4. ಕುಚಿಶಫರಂ ಪೂಗಳ್ಳು ಮನಂಗೆನಲೆ ಮಾಡಿದನೈಂದ್ರಮೆಂಬ ನಾಟಕವಿಧಿಯಂ.

*Ajita Purana*. V — 6.

*Sāhasa Bheema Vijaya* but later, changed it for the Champoo form.

Durgasimha in his Kannada *Panchatantra* (1145) <sup>1</sup> made a mention that the queens Mahadevi and Roopadevi played the roles of Seeta and Rama for self entertainment. The words used in this context are *Kṛtakanāṭakamanāḍi* <sup>2</sup> and they suggest the popularity of mythological characters as dramatic heroes and heroines. The reference of Durgasimha is eloquent regarding the genuine love for the drama in Karnataka in his times. If 'Nāṭaka' was not so popular, Durgasimha would not have used the word in his work. Moreover, it is the queens that impersonated Seeta and Rama and their *nāṭaka* was *kṛtaka* in contrast with perhaps the *genuine* performance at the court with all its paraphernalia. The reference is valuable as it indicates a flourishing theatre possibly in the court of the Chālukya king Jagadēkamalla whose patronage Durgasimha enjoyed.

*Panchatantra* mentions also the name of an earlier Kannada writer — Kannamayya, who composed the 'delightful' *Mālavi Mādhava*.<sup>3</sup> The date of the composition is about 900 A.D. according to Sri Govinda Pai.<sup>4</sup> *Jayakeerti* also made a mention of the *Karnāṭa Mālavi Mādhava* in his *Chhandōmukāsana*. In spite of the incompatibility in the names Mālavi and Mālavi, a close similarity in the titles suggests that the *Mālavi Mādhava* of Kannamayya might have been a rendering into Kannada, of the *Mālavi Mādhava* of Bhavabhūti. Even if the play was conceived independently by Kannamayya<sup>5</sup> with its theme based on the marriage of Krishna (Mādhava) with the princess of Mālava (Mālavi) as inferred by Sri Pai, it would evidently have been a play in Kannada, thus taking the Kannada drama back to about 900 A. D.

So far, the available evidences indicate the Kannada drama as it

1. Sri. Govinda Pai puts it back to 1031 A.D. — *Op. cit.* p. 19.

2. '... ಇತ್ತಲಾ ಮಹಾದೇವಿಯು ರೂಪಾದೇವಿಯು ಮಂಜುರಾಜರೊಡನೆ ವಿನೋದಾರ್ಥದಿಂ  
ಸೀತೆಯು ರಾಮನಾಗಿ ಕೃತಕನಾಟಕವನಾಡಿ ...'

— *Panchatantra* : II Chapter in the story of Ajita. p. 194-5.

3. ಪರಮ ಕವಿತ್ವರ ಚಿಂತೆ  
ಪರಮವಿನಮನವ ಮಾರವಿ ಮಾರವವಂ  
ವಿರಚಿಸಿದ ಕನ್ನ ಮಯ್ಯಂ  
ಬರಮಾಗಂ ಸುಕವಿ ಬಗೆವೊಡಿಸ್ಸಂ ಮುನ್ನಂ

ಪಂಚತಂತ್ರ 1. ೨೨.

4. Govinda Pai : *Op. cit.* p. 19.

5. Kannamayya was identified by R. Narasimhaacharya with 'Karnaparya' the author of *Neminātha Parāya* (*Karnataka Karichrite* Vol. I p. 139) : Sri Govinda Pai disagrees with this and opines that Kannamayya and Karnaparya were different poets. — Govinda Pai *Op. cit.* p. 19.

mostly existed in the *court theatre*. Had there been in Kannada a drama-form before 900 A. D., surely, *Kavirāja Mārga* of Nṛpatunga the earliest extant Kannada work would have made a mention of it. Nṛpatunga however recalls with gratitude a number of poets who preceded him.<sup>1</sup> Some of these poets who are believed to have written 'Kāvya' might have written drama also as 'Kāvya' must have included 'Nāṭaka' even in Kannada, because of the pressing influence of the Sanskrit language particularly in reading the connotation of words. It is thus possible that Nṛpatunga did not make a special and separate mention of Nāṭaka. Viewing this from another angle, it is convincing that the life of a people, with regard to their art and culture in particular, would neither grow nor fall all too suddenly. Visible traces of art and culture are embedded in the invisible past, and thus, if some tangible traces of the existence of drama could be found in the early 10th century, the tradition must have found its roots further back in the past; but the absence of earlier evidences to the written drama or the court theatre leads one to consider as to whether the court theatre had its beginning in Karnatak only after the Sanskrit plays had come to be known all over. From those early days to the recent times of *Mitravinda Govinda*, representative Sanskrit plays seem to have been translated into Kannada from time to time, obviously for the stage. Along with the Kannada versions of Sanskrit plays, original Sanskrit plays like *Jāmbavati Kalyāṇam* were also put on the stage by the court theatre; and besides both these, a specialised 'dance-drama' that went by the name 'Nāṭaka' was always popular in the royal court. This type of *Nṛtya-nāṭaka* or Theme-dance that included music and gesture enjoyed a predominant position and immense popularity in the court theatre from about the 12th century to 17th century possibly at the cost of prose-plays. It is not improbable, as Sri Bendre suggested, that the steady development of *Gandharvagāna* from the times of Chalukyas of Kalyani on the one hand, and the advent of the Vaishnava methods of *Kathā keertane*, *bhāv-nṛtya*, *bhāv-geeta* and *bhāv-kathā* on the other, contributed considerably to the popularity of the dance-drama for a long time from the 12th century.<sup>2</sup> The court thus preserved a theatrical tradition and nursed it as an important institution of literary and

1. ಪರಮ ಶ್ರೀವಿಜಯ ಕವೀಶ್ವರ ಪಂಡಿತ ಚಂದ್ರಲೋಕ ಪಾಲಾದಿಗಳ  
ನಿರತಿರಯ ವಸ್ತುವಿಸ್ತರ ವಿರಚನೆ ಲಕ್ಷ್ಯಂ ತವ್ ಆದ್ಯಕಾವ್ಯಕ್ಕೆಂದುಂ

—*Kavirajamārga* VII 33.

2. Sri. D. R. Bendre : *Kannada Nāṭakada Prārambhakāla* : *Jayanti* : Sept. 1950-  
pp. 144 46.

cultural life from very early times and almost definitely, from the 8th century A.D. If ever there existed a theatre in Karnatak earlier than 800 A. D., it must have been the folk theatre which now demands a fuller consideration.

#### THE FOLK THEATRE:

Even if the court theatre produced Kannada versions of Sanskrit plays it was meant for the entertainment of the privileged elite. The common man perhaps had no access to the court theatre, as some times, queens and kings played roles therein.<sup>1</sup> This explains the development of the folk stage independent of the court theatre which was at best meant exclusively for the 'classes' and not the 'masses'. Yet, there seems to have been an inevitable contact between the theatre of the 'classes' and that of the 'masses' with a compelling mutual influence. The contact was perhaps two-fold. The court, as a patron of the folk theatre, invited representative folk troupes to stage shows for the benefit of its own privileged audiences. *Dashāvatārada Nāṭaka* mentioned by Govinda Vaidya,<sup>2</sup> *Taikunda Nāṭaka* which was possibly performed at the court of Vijayanagar<sup>3</sup> and evidences of gifts of lands to rural actors are in support of this inference. Secondly, the very methods of the presentation of plays on the court stage would have been influenced by the methods of the folk theatre which had had a deeper antiquity.

It has been accepted that the folk stage is the earliest form of the theatre in any country. Following the same retrogressive method of enquiry from the known to the unknown, we come across references that prove the existence of a flourishing folk stage in the coastal tract of Karnatak in the 19th century. It may be noted again in this connection that the professional theatre of Maharashtra is clearly the outcome of the folk theatre of Karnatak, for the Rajasaheb of Sangli, on witnessing performances of the Kannada Yakshagāna in 1842, gave a shape to the Marathi stage. The coastal folk parties inspired into existence the professional stage of North Karnatak also. A letter written by Krishnaraja Wodeyar III of Mysore to Manjeshwara Hegde of Dharm-

1. Veera Ballala, the famous Hoysala king is referred to as a talented actor in the Sorab Inscription dated 1208 A. D.

*Epigraphia Karnatika* : Sorab Inscription. No. 28.

2. Govinda Vaidya : '*Kanteerava Narasarāja Vijaya*' ( 1648 A. D. ) XXI - 118.

3. Cheruvu Belgal Inscription of Karnool Taluq ( 1514 A. D. ), T. T. Sarma : *Jayakarnatak* 1—4.

sthala in 1867<sup>1</sup> indicates that a party of folk artists came from the coast to the Mysore Durbar in the year 1812 and settled there performing *Daśavatārada āṭa* or Yakshagāna.

#### YAKSHAGĀNA:

Yakshagāna, the most picturesque mode of our folk theatre, flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries. The life and literary compositions of Pārti Subba, a great composer-exponent of Yakshagāna, who lived from about 1760 to about 1820 give evidence of the high esteem which the art commanded.<sup>2</sup> The chiselled features of his compositions indicate that Yakshagāna was a perfected art by the 19th century. His predecessors like Gerusoppe Shāntayya and Mādhavadāsa of Udipi had earned a name for their art and skill in Yakshagāna compositions.<sup>3</sup> Yakshagāna was well known in early 17th century also, for a mention of it is made by Govinda Dixita, author of *Sangeeta Sudhe* (1628 A. D.).<sup>4</sup> It is significant that Govinda Dixita observed that Yakshagāna was a special type of music. Dr. Raghavan also mentions of another musician by name Anjaneya who is said to have observed that Yakshagāna was a perfected style of music.<sup>5</sup> Govinda Dixita observed that Raghunātha Nāyaka, the Yuvarāja of Tanjore composed a Yakshagāna by name *Rukmini Krishna Vīvāha*.<sup>6</sup> It is said that Mummadi Timma composed a Yakshagāna in 1665. No more details about the composer or his work are available. A poet by name *Sulagod Hiriyanna* is believed to have composed two *prahandhas*, *Krishnārjuna* and *Rukmini Swayamvara* in Shalivahana Shaka 1685 (1763 A. D.).<sup>7</sup> These evidences indicate that Yakshagāna was an established mode of the folk stage by the 17th century and that it was essentially musical in form. Even today, the composition of Yakshagāna is essentially musical in written form, set in *Kanda* and *Vṛtta*; but during the performance, verses are interpreted in prose by the participants.

*Daśavatārada āṭa*: Yakshagāna illustrated the ten *Avatārs* or incarnations of Vishnu and so, it is also known by the name *Daśavatārada āṭa*. There is a significant reference to 'Daśavatārada āṭa'

1. The letter is reproduced by Shri Muliya Timmappayya : *Pārti Subba*, p. 121.

2. M. Timmappayya : *Ibid* p. 7-8.

3. E. P. Rice : *Kanarese Literature* (Heritage of India Series) p. 160.

4. V. Raghavan : *Yakshagāna—Jyākarnatak XII-II*, p. 5.

5. V. Raghavan : *Ibid*, p. 5.

6. M. Timmappayya : *Op. cit.* p. 24.

7. K. Balkrishna : '*Krishnārjuna*'—*Janapragati*, September 5th 1954.

made by *Govinda Vaidya*, the court poet of Kanteerava Narasarāja, that his patron king witnessed a *Daśāvatārada Nāṭaka* performed 'with a grandeur beyond description'.<sup>1</sup> Kings of Mysore had perhaps extended patronage to *Daśāvatārada Āṭa* from even before the times of Kanteerava Narasarāja. There must have been an established tradition of having such performances in the palace.<sup>2</sup> Govinda Vaidya, while narrating the modes of theatrical entertainment in the Mysore palace, mentions several other types like *Kattaleyata*, *Piridu Prabanda* and *Jakkini-Rajakeera* which indicate some prevailing types of performances 'close to Yakshagāna' as is suggested by Sri. Betgeri Krishnasarma.<sup>3</sup>

*Nāḍāḍigala Nāṭaka*: About a hundred years prior to the times of Govinda Vaidya, Ratnakara Siddha possibly referred to Yakshagāna in the *Āsthāna Sandhi* of his *Bharatesha Vaibhava* (1577 A. D.). The word *Yakkadigaru* used by him would perhaps indicate a troupe of Yakshagāna performers. In still earlier times, Kumāra Vyāsa the great composer of the epic *Mahābhārata* in Kannada, who lived possibly in the 15th century, provides evidences to the existence of a flourishing folk theatre in his times. His reference to *Nāḍāḍigala Nāṭaka* would suggest a 'drama of the people' or plays of the folk-theatre.<sup>4</sup> Kumāra Vyāsa used the word *Javanike* to denote possibly the curtain that was used for the stage.<sup>5</sup> In the words of Sri Govinda Pai--

1. ಹರಿಯ ದಶಾವತಾರದ ನಾಟಕವ ತೋರಿ  
ಮೆರೆದ ಭಾಗವತರ ಚಂದ  
ನರಸರಾಜೇಂದ್ರ ಚಂದ್ರಮನೋಲಗದರಿ  
ಪರಿಶೋಭಿಸಿದುದೇ ಪೇಳ್ವೆ.

— *Kanteerava Narasaraja Vijaya*

Edited by Dr. R. Shamashastri 1026 XXI-118. p. 409.

2. " In the kaitiat of Belhalli of Mackenzie collection, there is a reference to the 'Daśāvatāra drama'. During the reign of the Sode chief Rāmachandra Nāyaka, the Chennapatna fort was built on the south of Devikere. When the Bidarur chief—Veerabhadra Nāyaka—went to Vijapur, where he pleased the Badshah by arranging for the performance of the *Daśāvatār drama*, the Badshah being very much pleased, helped him, to drive off his enemies. . . . (this must be ) long before 1720 A. D. i. e., somewhere about the latter half of the 17th century" M. Govindarao : *Yakshagāna in Karnatak*

Annals of Oiental Research, University of Madras, Vol X-1952-53. Part II.

3. Betgeri Krishnasarma : *Karnataka Janajeevana* pp. 145-154.

4. ಬೇಡನಾದನಜಾತರಿವು ಮಾ

ತಾಡಿಸಿದನುಪತಿಯೆನಲೆ ನಾ

ತಾಡಿಗಳ ನಾಟಕದ ಫಣಿಯಲ್ಲಾರು ನೀನೆಂದ

— ಅರಣ್ಯಕರ್ಪ, ಸಂಧಿ ೧೩-ಕದ್ಯ ೪೦.

5. ರಣನಾಟಕಕ್ಕೆ ಜಪನಿಕೆಯಾಯ್ತೆಲೆ ರಜನಿ.

— ಶಲ್ಯಕರ್ಪ, ಸಂಧಿ ೧ ಕದ್ಯ ೨೧.

It is of interest that the English stage had its first curtain in 1577, about a hundred years after the times of Kumāra Vyāsa.

'Theatre'—Encyclopaedia of Universal Knowledge.

“ if plays were not staged in Kannada, and if they were not highly popular, Kumara Vyasa would not have drawn analogies from the stage as often as he has done ”. <sup>1</sup>

A detailed description of the Nāṭaka given by Nijaguna Shivayogi in his *Viveka Chintāmani* ( 1500 ? ) dealt with a distinct type of dance-drama which was termed *Shuddha Dēshya* ( purely native ) and indicated that the author referred to a folk-form of entertainment close to Yakshagāṇa.<sup>2</sup> As even today, the temple was the seat of cultural activities in the village in olden times, and possibly, plays were staged to please the presiding deity of the village or city. Speaking of the theatre that flourished in the 13th century, Dr. B. A. Salatore observed:

“ From very early times in South India, dramatic art has been associated with temples and royalty. In the days of Rajaraja I and Parakesarivarman, dramas were acted in temples. The *Rangasthala* or the stage is mentioned in Karnataka in A. D. 1225. There is no denying the fact that both in the Tamil and Karnataka, dramas were acted in early times ” <sup>3</sup>

Earlier to this in the 12th century, Aggala in his *Chandraprabhā Purāṇa* ( 1199 ? ) mentioned that the king Ajitasena was listening to a *Yakkalagāṇa*. The latter was possibly an interpreter or the *Bhāgavata* of Yakshagāṇa.<sup>4</sup> *Abhinava Pampa* of the early 12th century also referred to *Yakkalagāṇa* in his *Mallinātha Purāṇa*.<sup>5</sup> About two hundred years prior to the times of Abhinava Pampa, a very significant reference to native drama came from Nṛpatunga the author of *Kavirāja Mārga* ( 9th century ). While discussing various forms of Kāvya, Nṛpatunga made a significant mention of a particular form called *Nāḷpagarāṇa* with its different aspects like *Bedandegabba*, *Chattāna*, *Bāianegabba* and *Melvādu*. It is a point worth noting that these forms are not found in Sanskrit poetics, and so, are believed to be *deshya* or

1. Shri. Govinda Pai : Op. cit. pp. 10-11.

2. “ .....ಬಳ್ಳಿಕ ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿ ದಿನದಿನಕ್ಕಭಿನಯಿಸಲ್ಪಟ್ಟ ರಸ ಭಾವ ಸಂವಿಧಾನ ಆಶ್ರಯಗಳೆಂಬ ಚತುರ್ವಿಧ ಪ್ರಬಂಧಾಂಶಗಳೆಂಬ ಮುಖ್ಯ ದೃಷ್ಟಿ, ಹಸ್ತ ಪಾದಗಳಭಿನಯವ ಲಕ್ಷಣ ತಪ್ಪದೆ.....ಚತುರ್ವಿಧ ಮೋಹವಂ ಮೈವತ್ತು ಶುದ್ಧದೇಶೀಯ ದ್ವಯಮಾ ವಿವರಗೊಂಡು.....”

— ವಿನೋದ ಚಿಂತಾಮಣಿ, 4ನೆಯ ಸ್ತಂಭ.

3. B. A. Salatore : *Social and Political Life in Vijayanagar Empire II* - p. 414.

4. “ ಉರ್ತರಾಧಿಪತಿ ಲೀಲೆಯನ್ನೈಕ್ಯಲಗಾಣನೊಕ್ಕನಂ ಕೇಳುತ್ತಮಿದಂ ..”

Quoted by Shri. Govinda Pai : Op. cit.

5. “ ಮನಂಬಿಡೆ ಯಕ್ಕಲಗಾಣನಂದದಿಂ ”

— ಮುಕ್ತನಾಥಪುರಾಣ ಪುಟ ೯೮.

indigenous to Karnatak.<sup>1</sup>

Epigraphical references of *Pattadkal* near Badami pay a glorious tribute to one *Natesevya* of the 8th century who had mastered the art of dancing and acting. The inscription is categorical, in its mention that 'he alone was the dancer and the very best among the actors on the face of the earth'.<sup>2</sup> The two different words deliberately used in the inscription— *Nartaka* and *Nata* are obviously meant to convey two different shades of meaning. As Sri Panchamukhi interpreted, *Nata-sevya* was perhaps both a 'teacher of dramaturgy and unequalled in the art of dancing'.<sup>3</sup> It is probable that this inscription was with reference to an artist who represented the folk theatre which, like the Dance drama of the court, demanded an intimate understanding of both the arts. In any case, the inscription provides a definite suggestion that there was a clear distinction between the art of dance and that of acting which was well appreciated by people as early as in 800 A.D. Secondly, that there was a form of drama even at that time—a dance-drama that went very closely with the present Yakshagāna is also suggested. The *Pattadkal* inscription thus indicates a flourishing folk theatre in the 7th and 8th centuries.

200-400 A. D. : The earliest available mention of a folk-performance according to the late Sri. Kerodi Subba Rao, a noted critic and composer of Yakshagāna, is in the *Harivamsha Purāṇa* of the *Bhāgavata* ( bet. 200 and 400 A. D. ) wherein there is a reference to a *Bhāgavata mela* under the leadership of Bhadra Nata. The troupe enacted *Rāmāyaṇa* as a part of the planned scheme to slay Vajranābhāsura, a powerful Dānava.<sup>4</sup> This reference is in support of the antiquity and popularity of *Bhāgavatara mela* which must have been a close variant of the present Yakshagāna.

References enumerated above indicate the existence of the folk-stage along with the court-stage. It is natural that even before the court theatre came into being—possibly owing to the influence of the

1. "... ಚಿತ್ರಣ ( = ಚಿತ್ರಾಯತನ ) ಬೆದಂಡೆ ( = ವೈದಂಡಿಕ ) ಎಂಬ ಪದ್ಯಬಂಧಜಾತಿಗಳು, ನಮಗೆ ತಿಳಿದವಷ್ಟೆಗೆ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತದ ಅಲಂಕಾರ ಗ್ರಂಥಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಕೂಡ ಎಲ್ಲಿಯೂ ಉಕ್ತವಾಗಿಲ್ಲ..."

—ಟಿ. ಎನ್. ಶ್ರೀಕಂಠಯ್ಯ, ' ಭಾರತೀಯ ಕಾವ್ಯ ಮೀಮಾಂಸೆ ' ಪುಟ ೪೩೯ ( ಪಾದಪಟ್ಟಿ )

2. " ಇನ್ನೊತನೆ ನರ್ತಕಂ ನಟರೊಳಗ್ಗೆಳಂ ಈ ಭುವನಾಂತರಂಗದೊಳ್ "

3. R. S. Panchamukhi: *Progress of Research in Bombay Karnatak from 1941 to '45*—Part I Page 53.

4. Kerodi Subba Rao: *Yakshagana Hattu : Ranjubbhoomi*. Nov. 1925, p. 80.

Sanskrit drama—the folk theatre had developed on its own lines. It is not improbable either, as already suggested, that the folk theatre did influence the court theatre, if not with its very inception, at least with regard to the modes of play-presentation.

#### DANCES OF KARUNATAR :

The suggestion that the folk theatre of Karnatak is older than that of the court is agreed upon by many Kannada scholars, but the question would be as to how far the one is older than the other. Though it is not possible to confirm that ancient modes of the folk theatre could be anywhere close to the ones in the recent two hundred years either in the play-pattern or its presentation, it can be accredited that there was a form of folk entertainment—perhaps a combination of some dance and some music. This inference is supported by the Tamil classic *Śilappadikāram* of the early years of the Christian Era which bears a significant reference to the Kannada actresses and dancers who entertained Sanguttuvan, the Chera king at the Nilgiri hills which is said to have formed a part of the Kannada-speaking area even at the times of the Sangam Literature.<sup>1</sup> The Chera king was possibly on a visit to the Nilgiris when the *Konkan*, *Karnata* and the *Kuduga*—men and women-dancers and actresses, a hundred and twenty in all, waited on him. *Śilappadikāram* presents an elegant description of the 'dance and music', 'make up and costumes' and 'appearances and acting' of these '*nati*' and '*nartaki*'.

“The fierce Karunatar in their respective dresses and ornaments and actresses whose dark curly hair was loosely woven with shining garlands, whose incipient breasts were adorned with (jewelled) chains and whose long eyes resembled carps, sang. . . . .”<sup>2</sup>

The reference is evidently to a group of folk artists who possibly staged a *nāṭaka* which was full of dance and music to entertain the visiting king. Both dance and music seem to have had a predominance in their entertainment. In fact, they go together to form the essential feature of the indigenous folk art—the *deshya* type. It is also significant that the *Nāṭya Śāstra* of Bharata stresses the same elements, dance and music, as the fundamental aspects of the original Sanskrit theatre.

1. V. R. R. Dixitar: *Karnataka in Ancient Tamil Literature: Proceedings and Translations of the Oriental Conference* Vol. X. p. 434.

2. V. R. R. Dixitar: *Śilappadikāram* : p. 297.

## YAKKALAGĀNA—DAKSHINA GĀNA :

The term *Yakshagāna* is of particular significance while discussing the antiquity of the folk theatre. As Govinda Dixita suggested, *Yakshagāna* must have represented a specific type of *gāna* or *music*, perhaps vitalised with some vigorous dance. *Yakshas* are believed to have been the inhabitants of the South. Kubera, their lord, having been defeated by Rāvaṇa of Lanka, himself a *Yaksha*, is said to have fled with a section of *Yakshas* to the North and settled in *Alakāvati* at the foot of the Himalayas. This suggestion is symbolic in its support of the movement of the Southern people to the north before the Aryan advent. And, it is those who trekked on to the north that had to face the adventurous Aryans and submit themselves to the superior force. It was during the period of 'Aryanisation' that the conquerors imprinted their stamp on many an indigenous custom and art, religion and language. That was a period of supreme domination of the Sanskrit language and the *Mārga* style in music and art. The indigenous people almost lost their original entity under the Aryan culture. Their arts which were *deshya* or purely native in form, had to undergo a gradual transformation to meet half way the *Mārga* style of the Aryans. Even today, the word *deshya* or *desi* is used to distinguish the original Dravidian form from the *Mārga* style. 'Yaksha Gāna' might have been the original 'desi' *music* closely associated with the *Yakshas*. The fact that 'Yakkalagāna' or 'Jakkalagāna'<sup>1</sup> was extant only in South India and that not a trace of it is found in the North, suggests that it was essentially what could be *Dakshina Gāna*, or the Music of the South. It had perhaps developed on lines so independent that it caught the attention of the Aryans as something very striking.

## NĀLPAGARANA :

Among the available names that signify the folk entertainment, the term 'Nālpagarana' mentioned by Nripatunga is the oldest. The term is made of two distinct words — *Nal* to denote 'Nād', 'Nādu' or country, and *Pagarana* to denote talk or acting with an emphasis on humour. The word 'Pagarana' is taken to have derived from the

1. A strange parallel is found in the term *Jakkana Śilpa* which indicates a typically South Indian style of sculpture. It is attributed to a sculptor 'Jakkana' or 'Jakanacharya' ( *Jakkana achāra* ? ) who has yet remained a legendary figure standing for the *Style of the South* in architecture. The name *Jakkana* however, occurs but once in the inscription of the Māla-sankeshwara Temple of Turuvekere, built in 1260 A. D. ( *Mysore Gazetteer* ) Vol. II. Historical part I, p. 316. )

Sanskṛt word 'Prakarāṇa', one of the *Daśarūpaka* mentioned by Bharata and explained by Keith as "the bourgeois comedy, a comedy of manners." In this sense, the spirit of *Pagarāṇa* or *Hagarāṇa* is the same as that of *Prakarāṇa*,<sup>1</sup> but the term *Nāl-pagarāṇa*, set in 'Old Kannada' suggests a great antiquity for the word 'Pagarāṇa'. If it ever was a pure Dravidian word, it is not improbable that like many other Prakṛt words that passed on to the Sanskṛt vocabulary during the process of 'Aryanisation', it may have as well passed on to Sanskṛt to become 'Prakarāṇa'. If it was so, *Nālpagarāṇa* would indicate the oldest form of the folk theatre which was indigenous (*Deśya*); but even if it was otherwise, the *Nālpagarāṇa* remains a 'Pagarāṇa' played and relished by the entire 'nāl' or 'nād' thereby suggesting a type of entertainment enjoyed by the entire Kannada country as mentioned by Sri Muliya Timmappayya.<sup>2</sup>

#### OBJECTIONS AND SATISFACTION:

It is thus possible that *Nālpagarāṇa* had become a popular mode of theatrical entertainment by the times of Nṛpatunga and that it might have grown side by side with the earlier Yakkalagāṇa, the original indigenous music of the Yakṣas, or the *Music of the South*. These indigenous modes of the Dravidian theatre might have been flourishing even before the advent of the Aryans. Two objections are usually raised against placing the folk modes of Karnatak—especially Yakṣagāṇa—earlier to Sanskṛt drama. The first objection is that the themes of Yakṣagāṇa as seen today, are all borrowed from the *mārga* literature, from the epics composed in Sanskṛt, and the second, that no script of the Yakṣagāṇa composed before the 18th century is available, while a number of plays in Sanskṛt, and in some cases, excerpts of their renderings into Kannada are indeed available.<sup>3</sup> At the outset it may be said with regard to the first objection, that the present form of Yakṣagāṇa could not have been the same as that of the ancient Yakkalagāṇa, though with its inevitable bearing on the latter. The old themes of 'Yakkalagāṇa'—the 'Music of the South' might

1. The word *Hagarāṇa* is the later form of 'Pagarāṇa' and even today it has retained the connotation of 'humorous talk', 'coquetry' and 'cheap acting'. Kumāra Vyāsa used the word to suggest the same meaning in *Sabha Parva*—when Duryodhana who became a 'laughing-stock' at the court of Yudhiṣṭhira unfolded his grief to his father.

2. M. Timmappayya : *Pārti Subba*; P. 29.

3. Ramachandra Bhatta Hasanagi : *Yakṣanāṭakagalu*. Pp. 37-39.

have been in praise of superior powers, festivals, social habits, tribal wars and such others prevalent in folk-lore even today. After the Sanskr̥t language and literature became popular in the South, themes from the Epics and *Purāṇas* must have been immediately accepted here, because of their rich dramatic qualities and scope for presentation. New themes were perhaps thus borrowed and presented through the indigenous and mastered methods of dance and music. The Sanskr̥t literature, thus, might have brought only a fresh flood of rich themes to the already existing indigenous modes of entertainment.

The second objection regarding the non-availability of scripts of Yaksagāna compositions of antiquity could be convincingly explained, for the tradition of preserving the folk art and literature has always been by orally passing it down from generation to generation. Even today, not all the folk songs are written but they are just sung, taught and remembered. It is true that during the transmission of the art from generation to generation, a part of the original is lost. But it is inevitable and that is how art is changing eternally, yet its soul remaining the same forever.

#### NĀTYA:

Several other considerations contribute to the inference that there was a great tradition of drama with the Dravidians in South India. The word *natya* is significant, for it has derived from the root word *Nat* which is non-aryan and yet, it is only the word 'Natya' that has a wider connotation than even 'Nṛtya' which is derived from the Sanskr̥t root word 'Nṛt'. While *Nṛtta* stands for mere dancing and *Nṛtṭya* for dancing with gesture, it is 'Nātya' which has a good proportion of drama in it on account of its including *Anukarṇa* or imitation; imitation in dress and costumes, manners, methods and even talking.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Nātya has a theme of its own and invokes *Rasa* unlike 'Nṛtya' which invokes only *bhāva*. 'Nat' and 'Nata' are non-Aryan words and it is significant that the term 'Nata' is also the name of a South Indian clan with which another clan by name Kanna or Karṇa amalgamated itself to form the name of a new people called *Karnātas* who worshipped the Bull and also Shiva, the *Natarāja*.

1. ಸೃತ್ತ ತಾಳಲಯಾಶ್ರಯವಾದದ್ದು—ಭಾವಾಭಿನಯವಿಹೀನವಾದದ್ದು. ಸೃತ್ಯ ಭಾವವ್ಯಂಜಕವಾದದ್ದು—ನಾಟ್ಯಪೂರ್ವಕಭಾಯುಕ್ತವಾಗಿದ್ದು ಪೂಜ್ಯವಾದುದು. ಇದರಲ್ಲಿ ಅನುಕರಣ ಮುಖ್ಯ.

B. Seetaram. *Natarāja* : Prabuddha Karnataka XXXI-3. p. 68.

## NATARĀJA:

Natarāja who is an aspect of Shiva is essentially a Dravidian God and possibly the presiding deity of a clan called 'Natas'. Megasthenes and other Greek chroniclers identified Shiva or Natarāja with their own Dionysus, the God of the Greek Drama.<sup>1</sup> The identity is due to the fact that Natarāja is the presiding deity of the Indian—and particularly the Dravidian drama. These evidences suggest that ancient people of the South, particularly of Karnatak had a tradition of drama and a fascination for it. When they came in close contact with the Aryans during the period of 'aryanisation', it is possible they gave something of their indigenous theatrical traditions to the invaders.

## DRAVIDIAN CONTRIBUTION TO NĀTYA SĀSTRA:

*Nātya Śāstra* of Bharata is considered the *fifth* Veda, thereby clearly suggesting that it was not in the original Aryan fold. Bharata and his hundred sons (evidently a clan) who staged the first drama on the occasion of *Indra Dhvajotsava* did not enjoy the same Vedic status as the 'pure' Aryans. These hints also strengthen the inference that the Dravidians might have given their theatrical traditions to the Aryans. *Nātya Śāstra* itself is said to bear an eloquent testimony to its incorporating Dravidian dramatic methods. Sri. A. R. Krishna Shastri supports the view on account of the following reasons<sup>2</sup>—

1. The technique of the Kannada 'Bayalāta' the Tamil 'Terukkattam' and the Telugu 'Veethi nataka' very closely resemble the modes and technique elaborated by *Nātya Śāstra*.<sup>3</sup>
2. "A number of strange words that occur in the *Nātya Śāstra* suggest that the latter must have taken some Dravidian *Satva*."
3. Looking at the variety and originality of the Dravidian metres, music and dance, one would feel that they had a richer wealth of the art of dance and drama—than the

1. Cambridge Indian History : Vol. I, p. 419 and 422.

2. A. R. Krishna Shastri: *Samskr̥ta Nāṭaka*, p. 48.

3. 'ಭರತನ ನಾಟ್ಯಶಾಸ್ತ್ರದಲ್ಲಿ ಆಹಾರಾದಿಗಳನ್ನು ಕುರಿತು ಹೇಳಿರುವ ಅಭ್ಯಾಸದಲ್ಲಿನ ಹಲವು ಅಂಶಗಳನ್ನು ತಿಳಿಸಿಕೊಟ್ಟಿರುವುದು. ಕರ್ಣಾಟಕದ ಯಕ್ಷಗಾನಗಳಲ್ಲಿಯೂ ನೋಡಬಹುದು.....ಯಕ್ಷಗಾನದ ಹಾಡುಗಳು, ವೈಯಾಕರಣಗಳು ಅದ್ಭುತವಾಗಿರುತ್ತವೆ. ಭರತದಲ್ಲಿ ಹೇಳಿರುವ ದಂಡಕ, ರೇಚಿತ, ಕ್ರಾಂತಕ ಮೊದಲಾದ ಪದಗಳೆಲ್ಲ ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಶುದ್ಧವಾಗಿ ಕಾಣಬರುತ್ತವೆ.....' ದೇವುಡು—'ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ'. January 1934. p. 56.

Aryans. In the Aryan and non-Aryan process of mutual exchange, many a non-Aryan God and Rīṣi found a place in the Aryan hierarchy and so, it is not improbable that the Aryans borrowed the great theatrical traditions of the Dravidians. Once taken, they made it their own by moulding it into a new shape. In other words, the so called *mārga* should have been evolved out of the contact with the *deśya*.

Among the significant contributions possibly made by the ancient Dravidian theatre to Sanskr̥t Dramaturgy are perhaps modes of dancing and music, devotional themes and important characters like *Sūtradhāra* and *Vidhūṣaka*. South India, and particularly Karnatak is the home of the *Bhakti* movement and the soil always had the seed of this movement centuries before the *Dāsas* came up to preach. It is not improbable that the Aryans inculcated the *Bhakti mārga* and based their plays on themes of *bhakti* after their close contact with the Dravidians. The folk theatre of Karnatak has still preserved some relics of such ancient performances of the *Dāsas*.

#### SŪTRADHĀRA :

The *Sūtradhāra* of Sanskr̥t drama, as his name suggests, should be responsible for the most important part in the production and presentation of the play, but actually, he is not very important there. Apart from his appearance in the beginning of the play to invoke the blessing of Gods and to conduct formalities with the audience, he is seldom seen on the stage again. But in the *Bhāgavatara āṭa* or *Yakṣagāna* and *Doddāta* of Karnatak, the *Bhāgavata* even today justifies the name *Sūtradhāra*, as he is seen on the stage from the beginning of the performance to the end of it. *Bhāgavata* is the virtual *Sūtradhāra* of the show having a complete control on the stage as well as the artist. He is responsible for the movement of the play and its climax. It is the *Bhāgavata* who prompts every character to self-expression in action and conversation and in short, he conducts the entire performance. In this sense, the *Bhāgavata* of *Yakṣagāna* is the *real* *Sūtradhāra*. The responsibility and contribution of the *Bhāgavata* seems to have prompted the Aryans to retain him in their plays with the name *Sūtradhāra*, but gradually they must have stripped him of his responsibilities until *more modern* methods like the character himself making a self-introduction and singing his own songs—were introduced. As there could not be a substitute for invoking the blessings of Gods

and making preliminary introductions to the audience in the beginning of the play, the 'Sūtradhāra' had to be retained but he was confined only to *Pūrvā ranga*.

*Nāṭya Śāstra* laid a great emphasis on music and dance in drama, but the later Sanskrit plays did not lay the same emphasis on these 'fundamental' aspects of drama. It cannot be said whether the change was due to reformatory efforts of later playwrights who recognised non-Aryan elements in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*. But the folk theatre of Karnatak, however, has even today in its known forms like *Gombeyāṭa*, *Yakṣagāna* and *Doḍḍūṭa*, treats *dance and music* as the fundamental aspects of its drama. The earliest modes of the folk theatre of Karnatak must have attracted the attention of the Aryans who eagerly borrowed the fundamentals and gave them their own magic touch.

This discussion suggests that the antiquity of the folk theatre of Karnatak possibly goes far earlier to the date of the compilation of *Nāṭya Śāstra*. That the folk theatre did truly represent the life and arts of the people to whom it belonged is considered in the following chapter.

### III

## THE FOLK THEATRE

#### PEOPLE :

*Folk*, the ethnic term suggests a group of kindred people forming a tribe or a nation; now generally used with reference to a primitive stage of social organisation, especially to those emerging from the tribal state (Webster). This description suggests that the 'folk people' would collectively be the masses of people of 'lower' culture in a homogeneous social group, a people bounded together by ties of race, language and religion; and a group, the great proportion of which tends to preserve its indigenous and characteristic forms of civilization, custom, arts, crafts and tradition unchanged from generation to generation.

#### THEATRE :

Folk Theatre is the theatre of the masses and is also called 'The Village Theatre', 'The Rural Theatre' and 'The Peoples' Theatre'. The folk theatre usually reflects on the past of a country's theatre and forms the basic structure of the professional and amateur theatres of the urban area. It is a live-spring which continually supplies the *elan vital* to its counterparts. It preserves, rejuvenates and inspires the cultural achievement of the people. It forms the source and supplies resources for the progress of theatrical art.

'Real India lives in her villages,' because the village houses the folk with all its 'soft green of the soul' of culture, art and tradition. It is the village that has protected the folk arts—the dance, music and drama in their original simplicity and sublime glory. Dance, especially, is the most original, spontaneous and universal method of expression of joys of life and that has yet remained the treasure of the village. The mainstay of the folk theatre is its dance—be it ritual, religious or secular.

#### ORIGIN IN RITUAL :

"The origin of the theatre is to be found in the religious and ceremonial cult through which primitive peoples of all times have sought to promote the welfare of the tribe by incurring the favour of deities and placating the spirit of evil.<sup>1</sup> To know the full implication

1. Julius Bab—*Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 13, p. 598.

of this remark of Julius Bab and also the *raison d'être* of the folk theatre, it is essential to look into the working of the mind of the primitive man.

The primitive man was guided possibly more by impulses and instinct than reasoning. Ignorance of the causation of the natural phenomena on the one hand and the lack of capacity for cogent reasoning on the other, made the primitive man FEAR everything he did not properly understand. Fear was the dominant instinct that persuaded his activity; fear especially of hunger, sleep, sex and evils. Rituals, when analysed, show the effort of the primitive man to invoke the aid of the phenomenal powers to get their assistance in keeping the four-fold fears away from his doors, or to offer thanks when his wishes were fulfilled. There is perhaps no ritual which is not either an invocation or a thanks-giving to an unearthly Power.

Of the four, the *fear of evil* (*Bhaya*) dominated and gave rise to a number of rituals. The ritual was to please the evil spirit (*Devya*) which was understood to have been causing the evil, or to please its superior power (*Dēva*) which was capable of controlling it. It was natural that the ghost, a master of evils was much feared and respected. The ghosts, in the eye of the folk, would express themselves by hurling an earthquake or a famine or casting a devouring plague. Both the individual and the community indulged in different rituals and worships to propitiate them in order to ward off a battle, a famine or a disease and when relieved, joyous and grateful festivals of deliverance were celebrated.

One of the most popular methods of humouring the ghost or thanking 'him' was to sing his prayers and dance for his glory,—often in front of one of their own who was made to *represent* the ghost. It is in this *representation* of the ghost and in the dance and music of the community, we see the seed of drama. Even to-day, when mostly the original fear has made way for traditional faith, old modes and original forms of worship can be seen in the villages of Karnatak. Through their worship, the folk people have preserved their arts and expression; it is here some of the old archaic modes of the existing folk theatre are yet seen.

#### THE HOME OF RITUALS:

The coastal region of Karnatak, with its thunderous skies, pouring rains, thick forests and dangerous valleys, intensely feels the presence of Phenomenal Powers, and so, has been the home of ghost-worship.

might be a totemistic relic. Ghost is the presiding deity over destinies of man in many a coastal village and on several fixed occasions in the year, festive ceremonies called *Kola*, *Nēma*, *Agel Tambali Bandi* and *Āyana* are celebrated with great eclat. On all these occasions, the particular ghost *Bhūta*, when invoked, 'possesses' a dancer who is gorgeously dressed for the occasion and decrees through him the destiny of the individual and community. This institution of ghost-worship is one of the oldest in the coastal region, 'probably as old as ten thousand years' according to Shri Ranganath Punja who believes that the ghost worship travelled into the Middle East, to those pre-historic civilizations of Sumer, Ur and Egypt.<sup>1</sup> It is in this ancient institution of ghost worship we see the original elements of the theatre,—its costume, dance, spoken word and the very idea of impersonation.

#### DRAMA IN RITUALS:

The coastal village has its sacred 'ghost abode' (*Bhūt sthāna*), a small building measuring about twelve square yards. The only small door faces either to the East or West. There is a swing cot inside the abode on which is placed a figurine made of brass or bronze in the shape of human being, tiger, boar or bison.<sup>2</sup> A priest (*Pūjāri*) worships the figurine every day, but the real pomp and splendour is witnessed only on days of festivals like *Kola*. It is on that occasion the impersonator—called *Māni* is carefully dressed up in the gorgeous costumes mostly made of indigenous vegetations. He is also painted and decorated in the traditional manner. The colourful costume differs in detail in cases of different ghosts though the general pattern of it is roughly the same. When the impersonator comes into the arena to give 'faith and assurances', he is taken to be directly under the influence of the particular ghost.<sup>3</sup> The dancing party of men—called *Nalke*, all made up in the traditional massive costumes; with *gaggara* tied up to the ankle and swords in hands, dance around 'the ghost' to the vigorous beating of *Tamani* the traditional drum. Songs of prayer—*pād-thane* (*prārthane*) are sung in high pitched chorus—all in praise of the particular ghost.

1. Ranganatha Punja: *Bhūtāradhane: Tenkunāḍu* 1947; Pp. 68-74.

2. That very similar figures are discovered in the sites of Mohenjodaro is significant.

3. There are many ghosts (*Bhūtas*). The prominent male ones are Annappa Jārantaye, Posa Mahārūya, Magrandāye and kalkudu while the female ones are Ultāldi, Jumādi, Kallurti, Raktaswari and Panjurli. The most ancient, powerful and feared ones are Jumādi and Panjurli.

The atmosphere will gradually grow into a state of intensity with the faster tempo of the drum-beat and the dance of *Māni* and *Nalke*. It is then that *Māni* will come to be 'possessed' to speak under the spell of the spirit. The whole thing is the new creation of an unearthly art, full of grotesque grandeur and tension.<sup>1</sup> The verdict of *Māni* is respectfully obeyed and the *Bhūtasthāna* has yet remained a highly respected and strictly obeyed institution in the coastal village.

The point for consideration here is the very basic idea of impersonation and the act of rousing a sentiment; a sentiment of heroism worked out by the ferocious dance of *Māni* whose whole body is employed as a harmonious means of expression. Though devotional initially, the dance vigorously works up into a climax of valour and it suggests that at one stage or the other, all other folk dances including *Yakṣagāna* have taken their basic patterns from the *Bhūta* dance.

Shri Muliya Timmappayya considers in addition, that the make up and costumes of the ghost impersonator has imprinted its influence on *Yakṣagāna*.<sup>2</sup>

The head-dress called *Baṭṭalu Kirīṭa* worn by demons and villains (*prati-nāyaka*) in *Yakṣagāna* which seem to have evolved from the head-dress of *Māni* supports this inference. The indigenous colours called *Karadāla* and *Ingalīka* traditionally used for the make-up of *Māni* of *Bhūta sthāna* are also used by the *Yakṣagāna* artist for his make-up, and thirdly, the procession of the *Bhūta* and the *Bhetāla* surrounded by the singing *Nalkes* would give a highly similar picture to that of the court scene in *Yakṣagāna*. These hints suggest that the oldest available ritual dance of the coastal tract of Karnatak might have provided some of its motifs and characteristics which came to be fundamentals of the later folk entertainments.

**NĀGA NRTYA:** The extant form of *Nāga Nrtya* (Cobra Dance) of the southern coastal tract of Karnatak reminds one of the totem worship of ancient days. A class of people who are serpent-worshippers have great faith in the cobra, which, like the 'ghosts', animates the devotees. *Nāgana Pātri* is the specialist dancer who impersonates the cobra. The way the dancer moves his limbs, the way he twists and turns his body into wave-like movements of the serpent, makes one

1. ಅದೊಂದು ಕಲಾಸೃಷ್ಟಿ . . . ಒಂದು ನವೀನ ಸೃಷ್ಟಿ ಮಾತ್ರ ಉಂಟಾಗಿದೆ. ಅರಿವೇ ಬಲ ಸಂತನಾಗದ ಭಾವವೇ ಅರಿವನ್ನು ಕವಿಯದ ಮಧ್ಯಮವರ್ಗದ ಈ ಕುಣಿತವು ಕಲೆಗೆ ತುಂಬ ಅದರ್ಶವಾದದ್ದು . . . .”

ಶಿವರಾಮ ಕಾರಂತ : ನಮ್ಮ ನಾಡಿನ ನೃತ್ಯಗಳು : ಸಂಭಾವನೆ, ಪುಟ ೧೪೯

2. Muliya Timmappayya: *Pancha Kajjāya* (1927), p. 46.

doubt his having any rigid and brittle bones. Narayana Aital of Kota is said to be one of the pastmasters in the art of cobra-dance and while performing the dance, "he looks a perfect King Cobra (*Kālinga*) with his fast rhythmic movements and supple twists." <sup>1</sup>

It is said that while *Nāganṛtya* is performed with essential animation, real reptiles come from somewhere and present themselves to the dancer awaiting his dictates.<sup>2</sup>

*Nāgamandala* is the festive occasion when the *Nāga* dance forms a part of the worship. The arena is traditionally decorated with coloured flour *rangavalli* and is made up for the performance. The dancer paints himself and comes out in the well matching costume to create a perfect make-belief. Other worshippers start singing and dancing around the *Pātri* to the wild accompaniment of drums, and then, he joins moving about the decorated ground slowly. When the beating drum, the singing voice and the dancing steps work him up to a tension, he will be animated to show the miracle of his performance, all too stupefying to the spectator who lifts up his hands in devotion to God Cobra. *Nāganṛtya* like the *Bhūta Sthāna* is a ritual dance-drama that is carried down from the past. The emphasis is not on entertainment in either case as the spectator is also the performer invariably. It is very likely that the *Nāganṛtya* also has given to the other folk entertainments including *Yakṣagāna* the motif of its dance, motion<sup>3</sup> and also its indigenous musical instruments.

"Even the costumes of some of the *Nāga melā* resemble the ones used in *Yakṣagāna*".<sup>4</sup> Both *Bhūta Sthāna* and *Nāganṛtya* have remained the basic institutions of the folk theatre—with their impersonations, dances, make-up and costumes. With the full play of the rhythm and its fruitful results, they initiate their devotee-cum-spectators into a wild and curious experience, make them forget themselves, relieve them of their toil and move them over to a different world—thus fulfilling one of the fundamental purposes of the theatre.

*Drama in Dances*: Karnatak has a rich legacy of folk dances,

1. Shivaram Karant—*Hucchu Manassina Hattu Mukhagalu*—p. 24.
2. Kumara Venkaṇṇa—'*Bhāratada Janapada Nṛtyagalu*' ; p. 31.
3. The original dance 'in which every motion was a word' as a form of expression has 'so completely perished that it is difficult to recall it even to the imagination ; modern dancing has nothing in common with it but motion."

—H. W. Mabie—*Short Studies in Literature*, p. 160.

4. Shivaram Karanth : *Yakṣagānada Punarujjivana*—Karmaveera Annual 1949, p. 28.

most of them ritual and many of them dramatic. The 'dramatic dances' are particularly colourful and impressive because of the costumes and make-up of the participants. The beating-drum is an inevitable accompaniment with fast and changing rhythms. The real 'dramatic' element is noticed in the dance when the group divides into two camps, one replying to the other either in music or in dance patterns. They cannot assume the full role of a drama. They do miss a chiselled plot (though some of them like *Malekudiyara Kuṇita* and *Paravantara Kuṇita* have their own broad themes), rehearsed dialogues and also a non-participating audience. They still fulfil a fundamental purpose of the theatre as a successful media of self-expression. They have also contributed patterns in music and dance—instruments, costumes and methods of make-up to the folk drama.

#### THE COASTAL TRACT:

Prominent dramatic dances of the coastal region of Karnatak are *Holeyara Kuṇita* and *Hariṇa-Shikāriyara Kuṇita*, both community dances with changing rhythms and meaningful but monotonous movement and gesture, *Rāneyara Kōlata*—an emotional dance of the community in two camps, and *Kuḍiyara Kuṇita*—the war-dance of the tribe called *Malekuḍiyas*. The last is a typical dramatic dance with its intense movement, musical climax and a fully developed sentiment of heroism. The beauty of all these dances is in the self-abandon of the participants.

#### NORTH KARNATAK:

Some of the dramatic dances of North Karnatak have pronounced themes or even clear-cut plots. *Paravantara Kuṇita* (dance of the Pramathas) is one such. On the occasion of the marriage of a son in the family aligned to God Virabhadra (particularly Goḍachi Virabhadra), five persons carrying earthen pots containing live coal will go in procession and the *Paravantas* keep dancing in front of them. Paravantas are dressed up like *Shankhadayya* with *Triśūla* or the trident in hand.<sup>1</sup> They dance vigorously to the accompaniment of the double drum called *Sambāḷa*. They speak out riddles on the life of Virabhadra and answer them recitatively to the joy of surrounding

1. Their holding *Triśūla* and following the faith of Virabhadra is said to indicate that their's is a faith much preceding the Virāśaiva cult, and that they belong to the *Pāśupata Pantha* which is closely related to *Saiva Pantha* of Kāshmir.

spectators. Another important dramatic element in this dance is the presence of the *jester* who throws funny riddles for the amusement of the people gathered. Thus, in this dance, there is a theme based on *Vīrabhadra*, the sentiment of heroism, the humour of the jester and also a crowd of *non-participating* spectators.

*Vīramukha*, a festive community-dance of the 'Kṣatriya' tradition also has a theme of 'winning a bride after fighting the battle'. This is a war dance in which men of the 'Kṣatriya' families in the village participate. 'Vīramukha' is an impressive celebration on the occasion of a marriage, full of symbolic action. The dance rouses sentiments of *vīra* and *śṅgāra* with its varying patterns, vigorous and colourful.

The art of acting and articulation has been better achieved by performers of *Yellammaṇa Kuṇita* who are followers of Goddess Yellamma at Soudatti in Belgaum District. The dancer usually has on her head a big bronze pot full of water with a face-mould of the Goddess tied around it. The artist dances to the accompaniment of indigenous musical instruments called *Tuṇṭuṇi* and *Chaudiki*, singing all the while, in praise of the Goddess. *Datti Āṭa*, also called *Bīre Devara Kuṇita* and *Oggara Kuṇita*<sup>1</sup> (Vyāghrayyana Kuṇita) are two other prominent community dances full of dramatic elements with their colourful costumes, make-up and music.

#### MYSORE:

Among the dramatic dances of pre-integrated Mysore, *Rangada Kuṇita*, *Nandikol Kuṇita*, *Vīra Makkala Kuṇita*, *Vīrabhadraṇa Kuṇita*, *Gārudi Bombe*, *Kolāta* and *Māri Kuṇita* are prominent. Among them the *Kolāta* is the only community dance that has a group of chorus singers which resembles the chorus party of *Bayalāta*. A colourful make-up and imposing costumes is the speciality of *Vīrabhadraṇa Kuṇita*, where the impersonator of *Vīrabhadra* with his red plait of hair, crown and bead necklaces receives devotion from his followers and dances vigorously, shouting songs and stories in praise of God *Vīrabhadra*. The beating-drum accompanies him as in all the other dramatic dances. The only folk mode which uses masks is *Vīra Makkala Kuṇita* in which three or four performers put on masks that bear glaring expressions of pride, joy or

1. Performers of *Oggara Kuṇita* of Devaragudda wear long coats, tight shorts, waist belts (*Kanchi*) and cover themselves with woollen blankets. A rope with bells tied at either ends is left hanging from the shoulder. *Triśūla* and *Damaruga* are held in hands. They are also said to belong to the *Pāsupata Pantha*.

valour and dance like warrior-soldiers. *Gāruḍi Bombe* is a huge bamboo structure in human form usually twelve feet in height, painted and dressed up as a man and woman. Such huge 'human' figures which are light in weight are borne by individual performers who dance to the beating drum. Others are mostly community dances and remain *dramatic* because of their special costumes, music in chorus, dance in varying rhythms and symbolic gesture. In every dance it is "the sheer excitement of rhythm (that) caught their (performers') simple imagination and they were given that joy of their own strength and movement, the joy of creation."<sup>1</sup>

These ritual dances are essentially dramatic. The actor experiences a state of self-abandon and gets the joy and thrill of creating something in himself which is other than himself, of communicating it to the audience and of dedicating the performance to Gods. In spite of the absence of the spoken word, these performances have the fundamentals of the folk theatre in their dance, music and gesture; but yet, they cannot assume the role of drama as they do not mean entertainment but aim at fulfilling a purpose or a commitment to the supernatural powers. In fact, the spectator himself is a performer in the majority of them. Yet, the dramatic dances, even without a regular theme, prose dialogues or organised method of presentation, do fulfil the essential purpose of the theatre by rousing a sentiment and creating a dream-land.

#### THE SPOKEN WORD:

Dance first and then music seem to have laid the foundations of drama; but the superstructure was built by the spoken word. In its evolution, the theatre has shifted its emphasis from the original fundamentals of dance and music to the spoken word. The real drama and the new drama as we understand to-day, was obviously born at the time when gesture was accompanied by words. The folk theatre of Karnatak has preserved some of the earlier modes of prose drama; earlier modes where the monologue and dialogue formed its basis.

If for entertainment and enlightenment of the urban society, there is *Purāṇika*, *Keertanakāra*, *Pravachanakāra*, *Jangama*, *Bhāgavata Kalājñāni* and *Gamaki* who interpret the epics and often impersonate their heroes, there is, for the entertainment of the rural people, *Gorava* (professional bard), *Gondaliga* (professional bard singing in praise of Goddess Tuljā), *Jogi* (devotional dancer), *Kathegāra* (story teller), *Hāsyagāra* (jester), *Nattuva* (actor), *Nakali*

1. Mulk Raj Anand : *The Indian Theatre*, p. 18.

(humourist) and *Bahūrūpi* (imitator). These performers belong to specified castes, specialised in particular professions which have given them their names. They usually, but inadvertently, speak only the *dramatic language* while impersonating others. Many types of them like *Nattuva*, *Bahūrūpi*,<sup>1</sup> *Nakali* and *Hāsyagara*, usually wear specific dresses. Others like *Gondaliga*, *Jogi* and *Nakali* often speak an imaginary dialogue between two persons. *Marammā*, commonly seen in the Mysore countryside, can be cited as an example who speaks an imaginary conversation which is highly *dramatic*.<sup>2</sup> The seeds of the drama could be seen again during the *Mahārnavami* festival when boys divide themselves into two groups—challenging each other in what is called *Gangā-Gouri Samvāda*. A step in advance, there is *Kole Basava* whose performance is built on a planned plot. The trained bull ( *Kole Basava* ) and his cow carry on ‘signal conversation’ as between Rāma and Sītā, and their gesture-language is interpreted to the spectators by the trainer. Often, the animals themselves synchronise their ‘acting’ with the songs and speech of the trainer. Usually the story opens with the happy Rāma and Sītā in the forest. Rāma goes to fetch the golden deer and then comes Rāvaṇa who takes away Sītā and ultimately in the fight, Rāma kills Rāvaṇa. The performance is usually done by two bulls, a cow and a calf. The calf plays the role of Lakṣmaṇa and also *Vidūṣaka* the jester, providing a good deal of humour with his funny actions.

The *Hagaluvēṣada Āṭa* even now occasionally seen in the Mysore villages brings a group of persons in full make-up and costumes to represent mythological and historical personalities. The group moves from door to door staging dramatic scenes and asking for alms. The

1. The ‘Bahūrūpi’ is said to have been popular in Mahārāṣṭra also. “It is said that a Bahūrūpi once went to the Court of Aurangzeb. He was ordered to imitate a tiger. This man who wanted to take revenge on a relative of the king, killed him while acting as tiger. The king is then said to have asked him to imitate a ‘Sati’ and burned him alive”. H. M. Desagupta : *The Indian Stage*, Vol. III. Page 190.
2. The man who impersonates ‘Māramma’ carries a *manṭapa* on his head with a decorated image of the Goddess of Plagues. His woman accompanies him beating the drum. When he finds a suitable place where roads meet, he places the *manṭapa* down and whips himself, he will be ‘possessed’. The woman then questions the ‘Goddess’ and gets replies:

Question : ಅವಹದ ಎಲ್ಲೆಲ್ಲಿ ಹೋಗಿ ಬಂದೆಮ್ಮ ತಾಯಿ ?

Reply : ಅಲೂರು ಈಲೂರು ತಿರುಗಿ ಬಂದೆ.

Question : ಏನೇನು ರೋಗಗಳ ಕಳೆದು ಬಂದೆಮ್ಮ ?

Reply : ಶಿಡಬು ಶೀತಳ ಬೆಡಗು ಭೇತಳ.

*Jogi* ( and *Kinnari Jogi* ) and *Gondaliga*, both dedicated devotees to Goddesses Yellamma and Tulajā Bhavāni, are seen commonly in the villages of North Karnatak, singing songs, telling stories and performing “ one man shows ” in front of houses. The accompanist to the *Gondaliga* acts as the *Vidūṣaka* with his many humorous remarks. The *Gondaliga* performance has also a good dramatic framework, for the artist opens with a prayer ( *Nāndi* ) in praise of the particular Goddess and then, sings in praise of the regional deities. The main story is then enacted in gesture, song and spoken word. At the end, there is the prayer song again, *Mangala*, to thank the deity for making the performance a success.

These relics of the mediaeval modes of the Karnatak theatre still linger in the villages, and they are eloquent of the early usage of dance, music and spoken word in making the performance dramatic. The emphasis was gradually shifted from dance to the spoken word. The performance still remained largely ritual, and though gained a hazy framework of the drama, it did not follow any rule of decorum, organic construction nor consistent characterization. Often, it was a curious inter-mixture of crude farcical device and coarse jokes; still the significant point was hit by the employment of the spoken word, which marked the birth of drama in these ‘ one man shows ’.

#### CRUDE PRESENTATIONS:

*Dāsarāṭa*: Among the village entertainers, the class or caste of *Nattua* is significant because it refers to the *Community of actors*. The ‘ Cheravu Belgal ’ inscription of 1514 A. D. mentions a grant of land to the daughter of *Nattuva* Timmayya and to *Nattuva* Nagayya, evidently on the occasion of their marriage. The Kannada word *Nattuva* is commonly used in the village to this day, to indicate an actor. In our villages, there is yet another group of artists called *Dāsa*’s. They used to earn their living by staging plays on festive occasions and *jātras*. *Dāsarāṭa* is not found either in Mysore or in South Canara.

An important feature of *Dāsarāṭa* is its chorus consisting of both men and women singers, unlike in any other mode of the folk theatre including *Yakṣagāna* and *Doddāṭa*. The performance is one in which both the *Heṇṇu Dāsas* ( women ) and *Gandu Dāsas* ( men ) take part. The leading lady of the chorus later plays the role of the heroine. The hero of the play is called ‘ *Godḍi Bheemaṇṇa* ’ and the jester, ‘ *Javāri* ’. There is no particular theme in *Dāsarāṭa*. After an invocation and introductory talking by *Godḍi Bheemaṇṇa*, the show opens with a

song and dance by a supporting female character. After her exit, the leading lady of the chorus enters in traditional costumes as the heroine and receives a great welcome from the chorus. After a song and a round of dance, she speaks to Goddi Bhīmaṇṇa, the leading male member of the chorus. The conversation moves around the theme of love. The hero expresses his love quite crudely, and the heroine promptly rejects him; but the rejection is not precipitous as it only inaugurates the real drama of the keen argument between the hero and the heroine, each in support of his and her stand. Reels of songs and sayings including *Jāvaḍi*, *Dāsara pada*, *lāvaṇi* and *Vachana* will figure in this long argument. The jester is always there providing a funny twist, a crooked turn or even a vulgar touch to the argument. The performance ends after a usual run for four or five hours without either the hero or the heroine giving in to the other. *Dāsara āṭa* fulfils another fundamental demand of the theatre, for it has a collected audience to witness the performance and enjoy it. Still, it lacks a regular theme and framework, and hence, the prevailing proverb that *Dāsara āṭa* is not a real *āṭa*.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the proverb, the performance thrived for a hundred years and became so popular providing a wealth of entertainment, information and humour, that when teams of *Dāsara āṭa* performers visited Mahārāṣṭra, it seems to have been readily accepted and adapted by the Marathi stage. As a result, similar performances with the same characters and characteristics came up in Mahārāṣṭra with the name *Tamāśa*. When in full swing, *Tamāśa* became such a popular and powerful theatrical mode, that it assumed the role of the most successful medium of political and cultural propaganda in Mahārāṣṭra.

In *Tamāśa*, the Marathi version of the Kannada *Dāsara āṭa*, the hero of the original Goddi Bhīmaṇṇa came to be called *Galfoji* and the heroine—*Rādha*. The jester Javāri came to be called *Sakhārām Tātyā*. Years later, when *Tamāśa* became a charming entertainment both in the village and city, several such Marathi teams visited north Karnatak. Karnatak eagerly accepted it, adapted it into Kannada and renamed it as *Rādhāna āṭa* after the name *Rādha*, the heroine of the Marathi performance.

#### RĀDHĀNA ĀṬA:

*Rādhāna āṭa*, which in course of time, assumed another name—*Rājāna āṭa*, retained the method, manner and music of the Maha-

1. ದಾಸರಾಜ ಅಟವಲ್ಲ—ದೋಸ ಊಟ ಊಟವಲ್ಲ. Betgeri Krishnasharma : *Namma Janapada Nāṭya Bhūmi*. —Jayanti Feb. 1952. p. 353.

raṣṭrian Tamāśa. Its song-styles came from *Chhakkada*, *Kawwāli* and *Lāvāṇi*. Violin and Tabla, the original musical instruments of Dāsarāṭa, came to be replaced with Sārangi and *Dhappa*. The only factor that remained unchanged was the dominant sentiment of LOVE. Whether it be *Harade'ī* (Turāi) that ended with the superiority of the woman, or *Nāgeḷi* (Kaligī) that accepted the superiority of the man, *Rādhāna āṭa* thrived gloriously on account of its love theme. It is even to-day occasionally seen in the villages of North Karnatak. With its chorus, improvised talking, recitative poetry and humour of the all pervading jester, this mode of the folk theatre did satisfy to a considerable extent the claims of a full-fledged drama. The performance was so popular that every village in North Karnatak had one or two troupes of *Rādhāna āṭa* twenty years ago.

#### DEFINED FRAMEWORK AND SOCIAL THEMES :

The romantic *form* and theme of *Rādhāna āṭa* hit another mark by bringing down the performance to the social plane. The departure from the mythological theme is particularly significant, as the change was first achieved by the folk theatre much earlier than its professional counterpart.

Prominent among the social themes are *Rūpasingana āṭa*, *Mukkunda Govinda* and *Sangyā Bālyā*. As is typical with folk-lore, authors of these plays are unknown, though the performances themselves are just about eighty years old. All the three plays are believed to have been based on incidents from real life and each one of them deals with a typically romantic theme.

*Rūpasingana āṭa* deals with the love theme of a married soldier Ramasinga, falling a victim to the charms of a married girl Kamalākṣi while away in a different city. He neglected Guṇavati, his wife and Rupasinga, his son. When the latter went to him and entreated, Ramasinga gave in and decided to get back to his home town. This decision infuriated Kamalākṣi and she murdered him one night. Learning of the tragedy, wife Guṇavati and son Rūpasinga appeared on the scene again and sang prayers to God. Their prayers were rewarded, for God came in the garb of a *sanyāsi* and brought Ramasinga back to life.

*Mukkunda Govinda* deals with a love theme again. It is about two devoted friends, one of whom fell in love with the wife of the other. The resulting complications came to an end when the friend made an offer of his wife for the sake of friendship.

*Sangyā Bālyā* is also built around an illicit love-affair between Sangyā, an aristocrat in the village and Gangā, the young wife of a cultivator; a love-affair which resulted in the murder of the former by Irappa, the husband of Gangā.

The performances sustained well with their amorous songs and exciting dialogues. There was not much of make-up and costume in these plays as they were built on social themes. A chorus consisting of about eight singers remained essential. A speciality of the performance was the theme itself which marked an advancement in the folk theatre. The deviation from the mythological plane was sudden and *revolutionary*, particularly on the folk-stage, but soon, social themes became popular and several troupes, including the proficient troupe, that came from Guledgudd staged them extensively in North Karnatak.

These plays painted love, with its dangerous aspects magnified. Anything excessive had to meet a punishment in the conservative eye of the 'folk', and so, murder and death became inevitable in them. The ritual tendency still persisted when Gods were brought down to revive the dead into life. Indeed, the plays had a moral undertone. To the folk-audience they appealed for informal presentation, the very voluptuous theme and the comparatively crude and sometimes vulgar acting. The plays had good poetry set into charming native tunes but more than the music and moral tone, it is perhaps the presence of a lady on the stage as the central figure of an amorous theme that kept the play going and made it popular. The performance proved to be a link between the ancient and modern phases of the folk theatre.

#### THE PUPPET:

It is human tendency both to imitate and to be pleased to get imitated; the result of the latter is the entertaining performances of the *Kole Basava* the trained bull, the monkey charmer, the bear player and the like, which are still seen in the villages all over Karnatak. Not satisfied with the standard of the animal's imitation of man, the artist with a keen sense of drama, created the puppet which held the stage from ancient times. In the words of Jan Bussel—

“Puppets have been known from early times. No country or date can be given for their birth. They appeared in ancient Chinese religious ceremonies, in Indian magical rites and have been discovered in early Egyptian tombs”<sup>1</sup>

1. Jan Bussel: *The Puppet Theatre*—p. 13.

The origin of the puppet is traced to the coastal tract of Karnatak, and even now, a number of puppets are placed in the temple-car and in the age old *Bhūtaśhānada Bandi* which are drawn in procession on festive occasions.

“ These puppets exhibit their compassion to their devotees by devised gesture.”<sup>1</sup>

The puppet is called *Sūtrada Bombe* and *Gombeyāta* in Karnatak and bears literary references from early times. Kanakadāsa<sup>2</sup> and his contemporary—Purandaradāsa<sup>3</sup> of the early 16th century have drawn analogies to the puppet in their compositions. Ratnākara Siddha mentions the puppeteers among artists that visited the capital of his hero—Bharatesha Chakravarti. Inscriptions, one of 1470 A. D. and the other of 1521 A. D. clearly indicate the popularity of the puppet at the times of Vijayanagar.<sup>4</sup> These evidences indicate the existence of the puppet in ancient Karnatak. Some scholars consider the puppet-show to be the most ancient theatrical mode in South India, which must have supplied the term *Sūtradhāra* to Sanskrit drama.

The puppeteer is literally a *Sūtradhāra*, for he controls the movements and actions of the puppet with threads tied to their movable limbs. He also supplies words and songs to his decorated dolls made of wood and significantly dressed in colourful costumes to represent mythological characters. Hands, feet, head, fingers and even the lips of the doll are moved by means of pulling strings or black threads (*sūtra*) to synchronise with the spoken word. Often, the puppets are made to perform some folk dances with flawless rhythm. All this calls for a meticulous training and practice on the part of the puppeteer, who, with threads held in both hands, often bound to wrists and sometimes held between teeth, engineers his miniatures into effective human movement and expressions. He usually possesses a grand sense of the drama and is an intelligent ventriloquist supplying words in varying voices to different puppets. Once the balance and synchrony is achieved between the spoken-word and action, the puppet becomes a living being, capable of realistic and delicate movements, full of intense action and emotion. Sri Mudavidu Krishnarao recalls the effect and grandeur of one such performance—*Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta*—and praises the

1. Muliya Tininappayya; *Pancha Kajjāya* (1927) p. 46.

2. “ ದಿಂಬದೊಳು ಪ್ರಾಣವಿರಲು ಕಾಂಬ ಸೂತ್ರಗೊಂಬೆಯಂತೆ ”

3. “ ಗೊಂಬೆಯಾಟವನಾದಿಸಿದ ಮಹಾಭಾರತವೆ. ”

4. Dr. B. A. Saletore : *Social and Political Life in Vijayanagar Empire*, Vol. II-p. 15

abundant artistic skill of the well-known puppeteer—*Gombe* Anantappa of Belgaum :

“ The puppet that was the love-stricken Satyabhāmā dislodged all ornaments and screwed off even the delicate nose-ring with ‘her’ own hands. The pathetic and powerful curses of Satyabhāmā on the Lord Creator and her expression of the bitter pain of separation was so touching that ‘she’ used to make the audience shed tears. ”<sup>1</sup>

When such efficiency is achieved, the audience forget themselves for hours under the spell of the puppet and so,

“ the male and female, child and adult, high brow and low brow, rich and poor all fall for its charms. ”<sup>2</sup>

As obtained in recent times, the puppet-show in Karnatak—in its dance, music, themes, manner of talking and procedure of showmanship closely resembles Yakṣagāṇa and Doddāta. Themes are usually drawn from the epics. The composition itself is in poetry—which will be interpreted in prose during the performance. Some of the most popular shows that held the stage were *Vatsalā Haraṇa*, *Sri Kṛṣṇa Sandhāna*, *Kṛṣṇārjun Yuddha*, *Subhadrākalyāṇa* and *Rāvaṇa Samhāra*. There would often be as many as ten puppets (manipulated by four or five persons) at the same time on the stage and the show would normally run for three to four hours.

In order to bring about the effect of an illusion, the stage for the puppet is so devised that the manipulator is concealed behind a drop-curtain. In the foreground are the puppets, each about two feet tall and significantly dressed. They perform histrionic miracles, usually shown in the rather dim light.<sup>3</sup> It is behind the curtain or at one end of the platform, the Bhāgavata will be seated with the musical accompaniments—*Puṅgi* or *Mukha Veeṇa*, *Mrdanga* and the *Dhol*. The puppeteer does all the talking and he sings also with the Bhāgavata; synchronising the song with the dance and movement of the puppet.

The puppet held the stage for years as one of the most popular modes of the folk theatre of Karnatak. No festival or *jātra* would be complete without it. The art of the puppet was the monopoly of learned brahmins in North Karnatak and usually, their families took their names after the puppet as the *Gombe* family. Bapu Ramachar Pandurangi of Ranebennur, now in old age, was one of the reputed

1. Mudavidu Krishnarao : *Jayakarnātak* - XII. 11, p. 27.

2. Jan Bussell : *The Puppet Theatre*. p. 16.

3. The petromax has displaced the kerosene-lamp and has taken away most of the mystic grandeur of the performance.

puppet players of Karnatak— like Gombe Anantachar of Belgaum. Some of the villages in Chitaldurg and Bellary districts and a few towns like Karjigi, Ranebennur, Alur, Kurvatti and Hangal are still the centres of the great art of puppet. Once a most popular and influential art of Karnatak, the puppet is fast receding into the background to-day. If not revived, with it Karnatak will lose one of its most colourful and ancient modes of folk drama, so full of skill and so richly entertaining.

#### THE COLOURED IMAGE:

Though not as perfected and popular as the puppet, the coloured image called *Togalu Bombe* was a much liked mode of our folk theatre, particularly in the eastern table land. Unlike the puppet which is a four dimensioned solid figure with chiselled features, costumes and decorations, the *Togalu Bombe* is an unimpressive piece of decorated leather to the plain eye, but the miracle is performed by its shadow on the screen. It is made of seasoned leather, beaten thin as to be highly transparent and is cut into figures. Highly artistic colouring and decoration is made on the leather figures with meticulous care, so as to bring out their costume in several colours. Thus, usually “the image of Hanuman with his red face will wear a green loin cloth and a head-crown in gold and emerald”.

*Togalu Bombe* is the specialised art of a particular ‘low class’ nomads called *Kille Ketas*. The entire family joins to ‘make’ the show. Behind a thin white screen a fairly powerful light is placed. The manipulator fixes the leather figure between the light and the screen (or some times, holds it with long and thin sticks) and with the help of strings or thin sticks he moves the figures and their limbs so cleverly that the coloured images falling on the screen provide a grand picture for the spectator on the other side. They walk, dance, fight and act appropriately in synchrony with the spoken word of the manipulating master. Song and dialogue of the male figure is provided by the leader while those of the female figure is done by his women. Chorus songs, war cries, loud exclamations and musical accompaniments provide a perfect background to the play and when done well, it would resemble a fast running technicolour film, so much so,

“when an old man from Dharwar witnessed for the first time the cinema show, he at once declared: this is our Kille Keta Play”<sup>1</sup>

1. K. G. Kundanagar: ‘Development of Kannada Drama’ J.B.B.R.A.S. IV—pp. 313-322

*Togalu Bombe* is an inspiring art in the hands of an expert who has achieved a mastery as to make his images live and perform miracles. A full-fledged performance, usually based on a mythological theme, would show on the screen, human and animal figures in fantastic attire, moving, dancing and performing acrobatics, all in close synchrony with the background music provided by the chorus and spoken words shouted by the manipulators. Battle scenes with moving armies are highly impressive. This art provides a great scope for the creation of fantastic pictures on the screen. The figures are specially made with meticulous care to give wild appearances and imposing movements. It can give a real experience, an experience that cannot be had from the modern stage even with all its amenities.

“In the play *Lankā Dahana* of *Togalu Bombe*, Hanuman’s leap across to Lanka was a perfect experience to the spectator.”<sup>1</sup>

The art of *Togalu Bombe* seems to have enjoyed a great religious significance for centuries in the Kannada land, particularly in North Karnatak and in the Kolar and Chitaldurg districts of Mysore. It was a time honoured tradition to put up a *Togalu Bombe* performance in the temple to invoke the village deity to shower timely rains. Even to-day, there is a Kille Keta troupe attached to the Hanuman temple at the village Gosbala in the Belgaum district, enjoying a grant of land. Every year on the occasion of *Kārtīkōtsava* (Deepavali) the *Togalu Bombe* is made to play the story of Pāṇḍavas ‘so that rains would be regular’.

Themes for *Togalu Bombe* are invariably drawn from the Mahābhārata which provides a great scope for action and impression.<sup>2</sup> The performance moves on at length for three to four hours. The method of *Togalu Bombe* performance in north Karnatak has a pronounced influence of Yakṣagāṇa, for, it has a chorus and its leader the Bhāgavata is the main manipulator here also.

“Without this personage nothing can be done; for he not only puts the puppet in motion, but repeats their parts, interspersing them with detached verses.”

1. S. V. Srinivas Rao : *Grāmakale Mattu Sāhitya: Sobagina Sugṛi* Mysore 1949. p. 5
2. Siam, Indo-China, Java and Bali have very similar performances and their themes are mostly drawn from the Indian epics though the puppeteers themselves are usually Mohamedans. It is possible that this art travelled from Karnatak to the Far East at the time of the great Gangai Konda Chola (1022-1043) whose vast empire included the lands cited above.

These words of Sir William Ridgeway<sup>1</sup> with reference to 'Dalang', the Javanese manipulator of the shadow-puppet holds entirely true in this case too.

Musical instruments employed in Togalu Bombe are indigenous. The drone is an improvised peculiarity with a broad-mouthed vessel, containing a little water and a jowar stalk fixed at its centre. The player, with wet palms moves his fingers on the stalk and it produces a single continuous note, quite a pleasant drone to listen to. Other instruments are *Pungi* or *Ektāri*, flute, *Dhol* and a mouth-organ made out of a hollow jowar stalk. One of the ends of the jowar stalk is sealed with the spider's web and a hole is made at the centre of its length. The artist then fills his voice into the hole and gets it fully magnified as to be the background for battles and other tense situations.

To-day the Togalu Bombe is not frequently seen in the North Karnatak village. Like the marionet, the coloured image also is fast going out of existence as a result of the invasion of the so called civilisation of the cinema marching into the village.

The different modes of the folk-theatre mentioned above give a glimpse of the evolution of the drama from the bare rituals into full-fledged entertainment. In this process the theatre seems to have dropped some of its old modes like the vigorous dance and monotonous music to accept alterations suggested by changing times, like a sustaining theme, a defined frame-work, and an intelligent use of the spoken word. But relics of past performances have still remained scattered. The ritualistic *Nāga Nr̥tya*, the wild dances of *Vaidya*, the one man show of *Gondaliga* and the formless performance of *Dāsara Āṭa* are some of the landmarks in the progress of the theatre. All these folk modes are interrelated and have naturally influenced each other. Together, they held the stage and gave the people a rich entertainment and continued thrills.

The most ancient and perhaps the most perfected indigenous art of which Karnatak could well be proud of is *Yakṣagāna*. Yakṣagāna comes from the coastal tract of Karnatak and is hailed as the repository of our best traditions in the folk theatre. It now demands a fuller consideration.

#### YAKṢAGĀNA:

Any art and culture is born out of the interaction of various influences of the place and the people. The human being is a child of the

1. William Ridgeway—*Dramas and Dramatic Dances*—1915. p. 220.

environment The different aspects of his art and culture will unmistakably reveal the influence of the environment he lives in. Yakṣagāna also is the product of the southern coastal tract of Deccan with a clear print of its influence. The coastal strip of Karnatak, especially the southern part of it, with its sounding sea, the thunderous and colourful skies, whistling wind, lofty mountains, fast running rivers, deep valleys, close forests and thick set green has remained a land of wild beauty and is an inspiring field for the creative artist, who feels the presence of the superman in all his surroundings. This wild beauty of the robust nature is richly reflected in Yakṣagāna and has made it one of the richest and most colourful of world's folk arts.

Yakṣagāna is a folk art and a typical one, for the one reason that the art richly reflects nature in which it is set and tries to create the superman on the stage. It puts forth a gorgeous make up and vigorous indigenous dance. It has been an entertainment essentially for the masses as differentiated from classes. It is a typical *Deshya* or *Desi* art in contrast with the *Mārga*, for, its basis is, *Sampradāya* the tradition, and not, *Śāstra*, the written code of strict rules. Yakṣagāna has gained a designed frame work; but this is far from the strict rigidity of the *Mārga* type. These considerations give Yakṣagāna the status of a typical folk art.

#### YAKṢAGĀNA AND KATHAKKALI:

It is the prose, the spoken word that makes all the difference between Yakṣagāna and its counter-part in Kerala-Kathakkali. A comparison between the two will reveal the close relation between them and hint at their possible common origin.

*Kathaka-Kala*, or as Dr. Raghavan put it, *Kathaka Keli*<sup>1</sup> is the extant Kathakkali which portrays a theme through the medium of dance (*Nṛitya*), music (*Gāna*) and gesture (*Mudrā*), without employing prose, and the mainstay of Yakṣagāna is prose. But both Yakṣagāna and Kathakkali draw their themes from epics; both of them emphasise on rousing the sentiments of *Raudra* and *Veera*; their costumes, ornaments, musical instruments and even the make up and method of presentation are similar. Their settings with an occasional single back curtain, the Bhāgavata and his accompaniments, the stage set in the middle of the surrounding audience and the oil-torch are close to each other; both are performed on significant occasions and festivals and

1. V. Raghavan: *Yakṣagāna: Jayakarnātaka XII-1.1*

both of them beat *Chande*, a high pitched percussion instrument to invite the neighbouring villagers to the performance.<sup>1</sup> It would, therefore, sound strange when Sri Das Gupta observed that " nothing quite like it ( Kathakkali ) exists outside Malabar."<sup>2</sup>

Kathakkali conveys in gesture every conceivable earthly and un-earthly thought including even parts of speech, and therefore, it is said that Kathakkali covers more ground than Yakṣagāna which is less symbolic and more rigid in its import. The art of gesture is a specialised science with Kathakkali, its dance is more vigorous with varying rhythms, its make-up is more imposing though it is said to be less indigenous.<sup>3</sup> All these differences are differences only in degree rather than in kind. Methods of make-up and costumes in the Yakṣagāna of *Tenku Tittu* ( of the Southern coast ) are very close to the methods employed in Kathakkali and seem almost its replica. This close similarity even in the details of Yakṣagāna and Kathakkali indicates the possibility of there being two branches of the same basic art. Kathakkali's emphasis on dance and music suggests also that its original pattern might have been the purer and earlier form of Yaksagāna before the latter accepted the spoken word as its main medium of expression. Kathakkali is given quite a recent origin.

" Historically, the origin of Kathakkali is associated with Malabar and more particularly with Travancore which remains to this day the repository of the art. The Raja of Kottarkara ( 1575-1650 ) is credited to be the first composer and originator of Kathakkali in its PRESENT form. " <sup>4</sup>

It is said that the present form of Kathakkali was originated in the early 17th century by Kottārkara Tanpuran who composed *Rāmanāttam* in rivalry with Mahadevan Zamorin of Calicut, the celebrated author of *Krishnanāttam* ; a composition on the lines of *Geeta Govinda* of Jayadeva. Both the compositions are in eight cantos and deal with the heroes of the epics, but the fundamental difference is in the language. While *Krishnanāttam* was in Sanskrit, the language of the Gods, *Ramanāttam* was composed in Malayalam. Thus the

1. It is called *Kelike* in Kannada and *Kelikai* in Malayalam.

2. H. N. Das Gupta ; *The Indian Stage*—Vol. IV. p. 235.

3. It is said that the costumes of Yakṣagāna are purer than those of Kathakkali " for the latter have a pronounced muslim influence on them " R. Vasudeva Poduval ; *The Art of Kathakkali* p. 15.

4. Premakumar ; *The Language of Kathakkali* p. 15

present form of Kathakkali was evidently based on an old form, an already existing mode of the folk performance, older than even *Krishnanāttam*—with a loose framework and possibly dealing with indigenous themes. It was full of costumes, dance and gesture but certainly was not refined. The reference is supported by Sri Madhavan Nair when he observed that—

“Kathakkali as it functioned in Kottarkara Tanpuran’s Court might reveal certain defects and crudity.”<sup>1</sup>

A refinement was brought into this ancient and crude theatrical mode by the munificent royal patronage extended by Kings and Princes like Kottāyathu Tānpuran, Kārtika Tirunāl and Uthram Tirunāl who were themselves great composers of Kathakkali. But the unrefined mode of Kathakkali of antiquity was perhaps very near the *Yekkala-gāna* which was possibly full of music and dance, some shades of which could evidently be seen in the *Bhootasthāna*, *Nāganritya* and *Vaidyara Kunīta* of to-day. It is of significance that it is only the present form of Kathakkali that had its origin in the royal Courts of Travancore. Its ancient form may have had something intimate to do with Karnatak, the home of Yakṣagāna.

#### OTHER NAMES OF YAKṢAGĀNA:

Yakṣagāna is also known by the name *Bhāgavatara āta*, possibly because of *Bhāgavata* the singing leader who is the pivot of the performance, or because its themes are mostly drawn from *Shrimad Bhāgavatam* the epic that deals with the fascinating life of Sri Krishna, or perhaps the players were mostly devotees of *Bhagavanta* (Sri Viṣṇu) and followers of the *Bhāgavata Sampradāya*, and some times, followers of Sri Rāmānujāchārya.<sup>2</sup> The influence of *Bhāgavata Sampradāya* or *Vishnu-bhakti Pantha* could be evidenced in the themes of Yakṣagāna. Yakṣagāna is also called *Dashāvatārada āta* as it chose for its themes, the ten incarnations (*avatārs*) of Vishnu which could be employed to expound morals with rich entertainment. It is also known as *Meladavara āta* for, obviously, the harmonious result of the performance was the outcome of a co-operative effort, as in the Tamil *Kūdiyātam*, ‘the play by a party’.

1. V. Mahdavan Nair : *Kathakkali and Kings of Kerala*, The Hindu Weekly Review : April 26th, 1954. p. 10.
2. Betgeri Krishnasharma : *Jayanti* March, 1952. p. 393.

## PRESENTATION :

In its final form, Yakṣagāna is an open-air drama. On the evening of the performance *Chande* is beaten to convey the news and to invite the neighbouring villages. The sound of *Chande*, sharp and penetrating, easily reaches a village of even six to eight miles away if the wind is favourable. On the evening of the show, at about 10 p.m. people assemble near and about the platform raised in the open, generally in front of the village temple.

The platform is about 16 feet square with bamboo poles fixed at the four corners. The top is covered by a mat made of palm leaves and the entire arena is decorated with flowers, mango leaves and also young plantain-trees tied to the poles on either side in the traditional way. On the three sides of the platform sit the audience spreading their own mats, while to the rear of the platform the Bhāgavata (in plain clothes) with cymbals or gong in hand takes his place with his accompanists: the players of *Maddale* or *Mridanga*, *Chande* and *Pungi* or *Mukha Veena*—the drone. With this, the stage is set for the show.

The Yakṣagāna performance of the coastal tract opens with prayers (*Nāṇḍi*)<sup>1</sup> to Gods Ganapati<sup>2</sup> and Subrahmanya, sung by the Bhāgavata.<sup>3</sup> The jester *Kodangi* then enters the stage in a queer costume doing an odd dance and singing a song. Two players in female attire called *Nitya Vesha* then appear on the stage to sing and dance.<sup>4</sup> This long series of several songs, dances and humorous talk provided by the minor roles, called *Tundu Vesha*, engages and amuses the audience

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1. *Nāṇḍi* or the obeisance to Gods (mainly to God Ganapati) is an inevitable aspect of the Sanskrit drama, in reverence to the *Rangadāivata*, the presiding deity of the stage. *Nāṇḍi* is an inevitable part of every performance or ceremony—sacred or ritual, and drama was a sacred ceremony with ancient Indians.

N. Narayan Rao : *Rangabhoomi*, VI 4. pp. 77-80.

2. Ganapati is an inevitable entity in the different folk plays of Karnatak. In the original folk and professional plays of the Maharashtrian stage also this 'God' appeared. Even in Bhavai, the popular folk play of Gujarat, Ganapati appeared on the stage initially, though the play itself was on a secular theme.

Dr. C. B. Gupta : *The Indian Theatre*, p. 161.

3. The tradition is slightly different in the Chitaldoorg School (Mysore) where two boys called *Madanagopala* sing the prayers.

4. "About a hundred years ago, there were two more characters by names *Chapparamancha* and *Arepāvu*."

M. Govinda Pai : *Jayakarnataku*—April, 1953.

and alerts their attention to the main show. Bhāgavata sings again to signal the entrance of the chief characters of the performance. From behind the curtain held at the ends by two persons, gradually emerge the dressed up participants one by one until at last the most important character called *Pundu Vesha* or *Bannada Vesha* appears. Then in a row, they stand together to make a bow to the audience. It is a sight of real-splendour and this completes *Poorva-ranga*<sup>1</sup> or the preliminary formalities. Then the characters recede out of sight, leaving the Bhāgavata and his accompanists on the platform.

The Bhāgavata then sings *Prastāvaṇe* or the prologue to the play chosen for the evening. As the tempo of his song rises accompanied by the fast beat of the cymbals, mṛdanga and chande, relevant characters enter to start the play proper. Every character dances into the stage, the pattern of dancing itself differing from one to the other in accordance with the spirit and sentiment for which the role stands. After the end of the short dancing to the accompaniment of cymbals, mṛdanga and sometimes chande, the character is interrogated by the Bhāgavata who introduces him to the audience. In recent times however, the tradition is changed and the character himself—be it the king *Rishi*, *Dānava* or *Deva*, at his first entrance introduces himself in dry prose, and then in a short speech acquaints the audience with the dramatic situation that has prompted him to appear. It is then the character assumes the role fully by interpreting in prose, dance and gesture, the various verses recited by the Bhāgavata. When the verse refers to a particular character on the stage, that particular character alone keeps dancing in consonance with the mood of the verse. The climax is reached when the inevitable battle ensues between the hero and his foe. Accompanied by the severe beating of chande and mṛdanga at varying rhythms, the characters perform the war-dance with all rustic vigour and grandeur, until the 'foe' is overpowered. Thus goes on the performance before the spell bound audience throughout the night and no one will be aware of the passing time. It was the custom—now extinct—to see the Sun in the East and end the play after invoking his blessings.

1. The term 'Pooravaranga' is used with its dramatic connotation from the times of Adi Pampa.—

“ . . . ಪೂರ್ವರಂಗ ಪ್ರಸಂಗಮೊಳೆ ಜರ್ಜರ ಪೂಜಾ ಮಂಗಳ ಪದೋಚ್ಚಾರಣ  
ಪುಷ್ಪಾಂಜಲಿ ವಿಕ್ಷೇಪಜಾದಿ ನಾಂದೀವಿಧಿಯಂ ನಿರ್ದರ್ಶಿಸಿ . . . ”

ಅದಿಪುರಾಣ : ೭ನೆಯ ಅಶ್ವಾಸ.

## COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP :

The Yakṣagāna artist is himself an adept in make-up and costume; he can use these elements expertly so as to bring out the innate character of the role he is portraying. The leading role of the performance is called *Bannada Vesha* or, literally, the 'character in colour'. The name is a worthy compliment to the imposing make-up and gorgeous costumes of the role. The artist playing the *Bannada Vesha* spends in the normal course, four to five busy hours in making up and getting into his imposing garb. Make-up is a specialised art with Yakṣagāna and Kathakkaḷi and is the mainstay in recreating the atmosphere in which the Superman revelled. It is the imposing make-up and costumes that recreate the Superman on the stage and drive the audience in to a dreamland.

The diffused dim light of the oil lamp called *Panju* or *Deevatiḡe* and the great distance between the last spectator and the artist were obviously the considerations that conditioned the art of make-up in Yakṣagāna in the olden days; and further, the costumes were to be convenient for the vigorous dancing performed almost at every stage of the performance.

Over the *Kavacha*, the tight upper banian and *Challana*, the tight trousers, every performer wears a full-sleeved upper garment usually in green or red, and a *veeragacche* ( 'hero's girdle,' a way of wearing the *dhoti* ). If the role is of Yama—the God of Death, Narasinha—the great human with lion's head or that of a demon, the girth of the character will be increased three fold with the help of thick sheets of cloth or sarees tied round the body. Loose garments in appropriate colours to reveal the innate quality of the character,—dark for the demon and reddish brown for kings, gods and chiefs ( *Maha Nāyakas* ) — are worn over, and then comes up the waist coat, embroidered with pieces of glass. The ornaments used are: beed necklaces and garlands, *patti*, *koralahāra*, and *sōge* around the neck, *Bhujakeerti* for the elbow, *Tola pāvada* for the wrist, gold plates for the arms, crown for the head with *Karnapātra* ( wings attached to the crown ), *Ken-nappo* for the ear, *Dagale* the flowing piece of embroidered cloth falling in front from the waist, and jingles around the ankles. There are significant head-dresses and crowns with pronounced differences in shape and size. The most prominent crowns are *Battalu Kireeta* with a great halo, worn by royal characters like Daśaratha and Dharmarāja, *Pombe Kireeta* worn by characters like Rāma and Arjuna, *Rak-kasi Kireeta* with peacock feathers worn by demons like Shurpanakhi,

and *Hanumanthana Kireeta* for Hanumān. A circular halo of the head-dress made of white and black cloth decorated with silver lace-tape and peacock feathers is called *Sirimudi* and is worn by characters like Krishna and Abhimanyu. *Sirimudi* is in the shape of the human heart and is made in varying sizes and colours specifically for different characters. The size of the *Sirimudi* is symbolic of the stature of the character which wears it. After making up and wearing the prescribed costume, ornaments and the head dress, the Yakṣagāṇa artist gives a final touch by holding the relevant weapon—the mace, sword or the bow and arrow.

#### SYMBOLIC COLOURS:

Yakṣagāṇa does not present two similarly made up and dressed characters unless warranted by a situation requiring two roles with *identical* innate qualities. Colours used for painting the face will be chosen with care. ‘Gods’ are usually painted in reddish soft white, while roles like Yama, Bali and even Harischandra are painted in black. Kṛṣṇa is painted in a pleasant blue and the leading opposite role—the *Bannada Vesha*—in black or pink. Originally, all the basic paints were made with the help of different indigenous colours called—*Aradāla*, *Ingaleeka*, *Kadige* and *Balapa*. It is over this foundation painting that careful working of the features of the character is made in red and white. The most imposing achievement of the Yakṣagāṇa artist could be seen in the make up of mythological characters like Narasiṃha, Rāvana, Chāṇḍi and Yama. These characters will be able to create an illusion that they are wearing masks on their faces. It is so because the nose is uplifted with a lump of cotton, eyes are made to look three times their natural size, and a string of bordering white dots provide a decorated frame work (called *Chutti*) to the face and then, artificial canine teeth are fixed up. The Yakṣagāṇa artist can make marvels on the human face just with the help of white, red and black colours and cotton. He steals a march over the Greek and Javanese masks, which though grotesque, wear but a single static expression. What the mask denies, the make-up of the Yakṣagāṇa provides in abundance – a scope to work the eye and the mouth. Some of the typical make-up patterns will be provided by great demon characters like *Chandi* and *Kāli*. These demon characters in *Draupadi Parinaya*—

“ had ferocious makeup with lion’s canines, hanging red tongues, huge breasts and dishevelled red hair all around the faces. The huntsmen in *Rukmāṅgada* and *Bhīṣma Vijaya* had tied branches

of trees around their hips to indicate their living in jungles. The artist who played the animal in the hunting scene wore a mask (?) and moved like a quadruped. Bheema in *Virāṭa Parva*, in order to look big, had tied around, bones of the whale.”<sup>1</sup>

The woman, the sage and the jester look very simple and neglected in comparison with the dominant characters like the King and demon. The ‘Lady’ is in the most unimpressive daily worn saree, the *ṛshi* in a long flowing gown and the jester—painted black, wears an odd long robe called *Kase kattuva Niluvangi* and the head-dress—*Muidāsa*. These ‘odd’ roles which stand on the stage in glaring contrast, often shatter the illusion of a wonderland created by the magnificent make-up of the main characters. This neglect can be accounted for, as the main sentiments of *Yakṣagāna*, *Veera* and *Adbhuta* could be roused only by dominant mythological heroes and not by secondary roles like the jester and the *ṛshi*. Still, for the sake of theatrical harmony, it should be necessary to pay some attention to these minor roles, their make-up and costumes.

#### THE OIL LAMP:

The glory and grandeur of the artful and imposing make-up and fabulous costumes could be fully appreciated in the dim reddish light of the oil torch—*Deevaṭige* or *Paṇṇu*, the only source of light in the village. In olden days, two torches were held by persons who moved forward and backward in the steps of the dancing performer, creating a fantastic beauty, by throwing a diffused reddish light on him. These torches formed a part of the performance and created an exquisite atmosphere of pomp and splendour. Later, the torches were fixed up on either side of the platform and to-day, they have almost gone out of existence, replaced by the petromax which throws a flood of penetrating sharp light, all too bright for creating a mystic atmosphere and often, this reveals something odd or artificial in the make-up or costumes of the role.

#### DANCE, MUSIC AND INSTRUMENTS:

Dance, the ‘race-mode’ of the people of Karnatak is an inevitable aspect of *Yakṣagāna*, and is the most effective medium for rousing the sentiment of *Raudra* and *Adbhuta*. Every character “including even the aged man that appears in *Bhishma Parva* dances to the accompaniment of cymbals and *Mṛdanga*. Dances are in three sequences, once,

1. V. Raghavan : *Yakṣagāna*, Jayakarnataka XII-II. p. 10.

while entering the stage, again when the Bhāgavata sings a verse concerning the particular role, and thirdly, with all intensity, when the battle ensues. Dance is associated with gesture in the former cases but during the third, the battle scene, the tempo is too fast for any gesture. During the 'battle', the wild dancing is in *Tāṇḍava Prakāra*, done in different patterns and at varying rhythms to the accompaniment of Chande, an ideal war-instrument. The hero and the demon with wild shouts of exclamations sometimes jump up in the air or turn like a top sitting down on the stage, keeping the rhythm all the while. The performance is called *Chakraguppi*.

Dr. Raghavan's observation that in parts, the dances of Yakṣagāna very closely resemble the dance patterns—*Arbhati Vritti* and *Nyāya* mentioned by Bharata, author of *Nāṭya Śāstra*, is of significance while studying the relation between the *desi* and *mārga* patterns and the influence of the former on the latter.

Music is essentially vocal in Yakṣagāna. *Shatpadi*, *Kanda* and *Vritta* are sung by the Bhāgavata at varying rhythms, and with tremendous power. The *ragas* employed are usually drawn from classical Karnatak music. They are *Mōhana*, *Kāmbhoji*, *Nāta*, *Shankarābharāṇa*, *Kalyāṇi*, *Rēgupti* and *Saurāstra*, the most popular and commonly employed ones being *Mohana* and *Kāmbhoji*. Though the *rāgas* themselves are few in number when compared with the several shades of emotions and sentiments roused, the Bhāgavata achieves the desired effect by employing these *rāgas* in *different rhythmic patterns*. The most commonly used *rāga*—*Mohana* alone is often employed with success in rousing different emotional shades like appeal, assurance, grief, romance and fury. The emphasis in Yakṣagāna is on the musical *form* of *rāga* and the *style* of singing.

Musical instruments employed in Yakṣagāna are only a few, but they are inevitable in the performance. Apart from cymbals (*Tāla*) or gong (*Jāgate-Kolu*) used by the Bhāgavata, there are wind instruments like *pungi* and *mukhaveeṇā* to provide the drone. Much of the native tune is missed nowadays since the *pungi* and *mukhaveeṇā* are replaced by the harmonium. Yakṣagāna lays particular emphasis on its percussion instruments like *Maddale*, *Mṛdanga* and *Chande*. *Mṛdanga* accompanies the Bhāgavata in all his singing while *Maddale* and *Chānde* are usually employed only in dramatic moments of tension. Chande, the most vital instrument of Yakṣagāna is a high-pitched drum, beaten with two thin sticks. Chande is the mainstay of Yakṣagāna in developing the sentiments of *Roudra* and *Adbhuta*. The rise and fall in the tempo of

Chande, accompanied by *Tāla* and *Chakratāla* (bigger pair of cymbals) brings about the rise and fall in the emotional intensity of the performer and the 'battle' becomes tense and thrilling. It is true that the cymbal is replaced by the gong, and Pungi by the harmonium but there is no near about instrument to replace Chande. Chande remains the life-sound of Yakṣagāna.<sup>1</sup>

#### THEMES :

Yakṣagāna deals with themes built around the mythological super-human personalities, gods, demons and dream lands. *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata* have provided suitable themes in abundance for Yakṣagāna. Moreover, they maintain a continuity of the Vedic influence—by simplifying into didactic stories, the lofty tenets and philosophical teachings of the Vedas and Upaniṣads. Instruction with entertainment made a lasting impression on the rural audiences and thus, the lessons of the classics were inculcated. It is in this sense that Yakṣagāna remained the *Night School* for the masses, breathing the everlasting spirit of our classical Sanskrit literature.<sup>2</sup>

In selecting the theme for his 'Yakṣagāna Prabandha', the composer paid particular attention to the time-honoured sentiments of *Veera* and *Raudra*. He also provided scope for exploiting war dances. Thus we find all the important battles mentioned in our epics are brought on the Yakṣagāna stage and prominent among them are *Kṛṣṇa-Arjuna Kūḷaga*, *Babruvāhana Kūḷaga*, *Hansadhvaja Kūḷaga*, *Karṇārajuna Kūḷaga* and others. Even if the 'Yakṣagāna Prabandha' is about a marriage (*Parinaya*) or diplomatic dealing (*Sandhāna*), there is perhaps no *prasanga* without a battle (*Kūḷaga*) in it. The title *Girija Kalyāṇa* suggests a romantic theme, but it opens with the destruction of *Dakṣa-Yajna* by Śiva and ends with the battle between the demon Tāraka

1. The objection that Chande would not be able to assist the portrayal of delicate sentiments like *Śṛṅgāra*, is more an objection to the artist than to the instrument. In the hands of an expert like Kemminje Nāranappa of Mangalore, Chande can be a charming instrument, capable of rousing any delicate sentiment. K. S. Kuranth, *Yakṣagānada Punarujjivana-Karmaveera* Special issue 1949; p. 27.

It is said that in olden days, Chande was so specialised that when it was beaten for *Kelike*, the neighbouring village could know from the very pattern of the beating, as to what particular theme of the epics would be taken up for the performance—T. Gopalkrishna Bhatta: *Yakṣagāna—Mitramandaliga Kāṇike*: Madras 1945. p. 30.

2. K. Venkappa Setti: Presidential address at the 'Yakṣa Nūṭaka Goṣṭi' of the 36th Kannada Conference at Kumta-1953.

and Subrahmanya, the war God and son of Śiva. Thus with a due emphasis placed on battles, Yakṣagāna, like Kathakkali, is a *Tāṇḍava Prakāra*, a variant of the vigorous war-dance of Śiva. *Lāsyā*, the delicate dance-pattern, also finds its place but only too occasionally, as in *Bhēṣma Parva*, when three princesses softly dance with appropriate gesture to portray their bathing in the river Ganges, or as in *Rāvaṇa Digvijaya* when Rāvaṇa with his symbolic dance, washes his feet, hands and face before worshipping the *Śivalinga*. But the very life of Yakṣagāna is valour and power, its dominant sentiments, *Veera* and *Raudra* which ideally befit a *Tāṇḍava Prakāra*.

Only recently, themes are drawn from Indian history and even here, due consideration is given to providing sufficient scope for battle dances. One of the representative *prabandhas* is *Rāṇā Rājasinha*, composed by Sri K. P. Venkappa Setti. Social themes have not made their appearance on the Yakṣagāna stage, for the obvious reason that anything dealing with the ordinary human being would lack sustenance with the rural audience. The folk people could derive lofty morals only from the super-human characters.

#### THE COMPOSITION:

*Sabhā Lakṣaṇa* or *Sabhā Vandane* is the only treatise on the prosody of 'Yakṣagāna Prabandha'—believed to have been written by Pārti Subba, one of the foremost composer-exponents of 'Prabandhas' of the 17th century. This treatise is said to be in close affinity with the *Nāṭya Śāstra* of Bharata. Subba's own compositions<sup>1</sup> contain a variety of verse-patterns like *Vārdhaka* and *Bhāmīni Śatpadis*, *Kanda*, *Vṛitta*, *Dwipadi* and *Vachana*, and are composed in the seven different rhythm patterns, *Sapta-tālas*, appropriately. Pārti Subba has been accepted by later composers as a model to copy.<sup>2</sup>

The Yakṣagāna composition rightly places its emphasis on intelligibility of poetry on the one hand, and movement of the story on the other. Simplicity in exposition is the secret of its glory, for it was written, not for the sake of the learned, but for the common man who prefers the *art* of drama and poetry to the *science* of it. It was meant for popular entertainment and not for the Court; nor was it meant for silent reading; but still, Yakṣagāna Prabandha remains a

1. Ten of his Prabandhas are discussed in detail by Muliya Timmappayya in his book, *Pārti Subba*.

2. But, the identity, bonafides and living period of Pārti Subba has been squarely questioned by Śivarāma Kāranth. Śivarāma Karanth; *Yakṣagāna Bayalāṭa*: 1957. pp. 186-214.

*Kāvya* as it serves the purpose of a true *Kāvya* by successfully arousing different sentiments.

#### COMPOSERS :

E. P. Rice observed that Udipi Madhava Dāsa ( of the early 18th century ) was still considered to be the first composer of Yakṣagāna. The second was Shāntayya, a brahmin of Gerusoppa who became a Principal Sadar Amin at Mangalore and who wrote a large number of compositions in this style.<sup>1</sup> Most of the later composers came from the coastal tract of Karnatak. Yakṣagāna being a folk art of the *Pādugabba* variety ( recitative poetry ), the prose part of it was never written. The most prominent and prolific of the later composers was *Pārti Subba* of the village Kumbala in Kasargod taluka of South Karnatak who lived possibly between 1760 and 1820 A. D.<sup>2</sup> Pārti Subba is called *Yakṣagāna Vālmiki* as his compositions are based on themes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. He set a standard, a frame work and a fashion to be copied by later writers.<sup>3</sup>

“ He has remained a tremendous influence on the vast folk-populace from the 18th century to the present day.”<sup>4</sup>

His compositions are simple, direct and effective. With no deliberate play on words, nor struggle for alliteration and other literary embellishments, his compositions read lucidly with direct appeal and are ‘ relished as much as ripe grapes.’ A number of lyrics cited in the pages

1. E. P. Rice : *History of Kanarese Literature* : ( Heritage of India Series ) p. 100.

2. M. Timmappayya— *Pārti Subba* p. 8. But this is contradicted by K. Sivarama Karanth who has explained that another Subba ( son of Venkayya of Ajapura ) who wrote in the last quarter of the 18th century was indeed the author of the compositions which are mistakenly assigned to Pārti Subba, a comparatively mediocre composer of later times. Sivarama Karanth : *Yakṣagāna Bayalāta* : p. 162 and onwards.

3. Karanth has explained that the golden age of Yakṣagāna was the Seventeenth Century A. D. The great composers of this period were Devidāsa, Dhvajapurada Nāgappayya and Subba, son of Venkayya of Ajapur. Sivarama Karanth : *Ibid*. P. 162

4. “ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಜನಪದಗಳ ಮೂಲೆಮೂಲೆಯ ಸಂದುಗೊಂದುಗಳಿಗಿಳಿದು ಲೌಕಿಕ ಪಾಠ. ಲೌಕಿಕ ಬೋಧಗಳನ್ನಿತ್ತು ಜನರಿಗೆ ಒತ್ತನೆಯ ಶತಮಾನ ವೊದಲುಗೊಂದು ಇದುವರೆಗೆ ಸತ್ಯ, ಧರ್ಮ, ನಯ ನೀತಿಗಳ ಪಾಠಪ್ರವಚನಗಳನ್ನಿತ್ತು ರಾತ್ರಿಯ ಕಲಾಶಾಲೆಯೆಂದರೆ, ಕೀ.ಶೇ. ಪಾರ್ತಿ ಸುಬ್ಬ ಕವಿಯ ಯಕ್ಷಗಾನ, ದರಾವತಾರ ಬಯಲಾಟಗಳೆಂಬುದು ನಿರ್ಮಿವಾದವಾಗಿದೆ.”

— ಕೆ. ಪಿ. ವೆಂಕಪ್ಪ ಶೆಟ್ಟಿ — ಅಧ್ಯಕ್ಷಭಾಷಣ, ಯಕ್ಷನಾಟಕಗೋಷ್ಠಿ,  
ಕುಮಟಾ, ೧೯೫೪, ಪುಟ ೮.

of *Pārti Subba* with their intensity of emotion, poetical appeal and literary beauty can live independently of their contexts, and when set to appropriate music, they can live as examples of good taste for times to come.<sup>1</sup>

Nandalike Laxmināraṇappa, popularly known as *Muddaṇa* composed two *prabandhas* of Yakṣagāna—*Kumāra Vijaya* and *Ratnāvati Kalyāṇa*, both very impressive because of their rich poetical beauty and literary merit. But some of the lyrics bear the heavy weight of Sanskrit words, a deliberate play on words and a love for compound constructions,<sup>2</sup> thus defeating the fundamental characteristics of the Yakṣagāna Prabandha. Sri Venkappa Setti himself, who has superlative praise for *Muddaṇa*, accepts that the latter's compositions were not staged because of their unintelligibility, excessive literary weight and non-Paurāṇic themes.<sup>3</sup>

Other composers of repute are Sāmbayya, author of *Karibhaṇṭana Kāḷaga*, Halemakki Rama, author of *Krishnārjuna Kāḷaga*, Ajapurada Venkata, Venkanna Kavi, Hathyangadi Rama Bhatta, Pandēsvara Venkata, and Matti Vāsudeva Prabhu, who were all of the 18th century A. D. Most of these composers were also well known exponents of the art. The significant composers of later times are Bāyūru Sankayya Bhāgavata, Hattangadi Rāmbhatta of Basrur, Mulka Venkanna and Paramēshwar Bhatta of Harpura.<sup>4</sup> After the advent of coastal groups to important cities on the eastern table land and Mysore, Yakṣagāna gained considerable prominence and popularity. Poets were enthused to compose *Prabandhas*. The most prominent among successful composers in Mysore was Aliya Lingarāja Urs ( 1822–1874 ) of the royal family of Mysore, who is said to have done about sixty compositions and some of them—*Girijā Kalyāṇa*, *Seetha Kalyāṇ*, *Jalandharana*

1. ಪೊಡವಿ ಗಿಡ ಮರ ಕಲ್ಲು—ಪುಟ ೬೬, ಕಂಡಿರೆ ನೀವು ಕಂಡಿರೆ—ಪುಟ ೭೩, ಧರಣಿ ಸಂತೆಗೆ—ಪುಟ ೭೯, ಸರುಪೋತ್ತಮ—ಪುಟ ೯೧, ಎಡೆಯಾರತಿ—ಪುಟ ೧೧೬.
2. ' ಶ್ರೀಕರ ಶತಮುಖ ನತಪ್ರಿದಶಾ ' ' ನುಡಿಯೇ ನಿನ್ನೊಡೆಯನ ಪೆಸರೊಡನುಡಿಯೇ ಬಡ ನಡುವಿನ ವಿಡಿನಡೆದೊಡ ಕೊಡಬಿಡು. '
3. K. P. Venkappa Setti : *Yakṣagāna Prabandha Niyama* :- *Pancha Kajjōya* ( 1927 ) pp. 128-129.
4. Paramēshwara Bhatta is known to have composed only three *Prabandhas*—*Prabhāratī Svayamvara* ( from the Bhāgavata ), *Kālanēmi Kāḷaga* ( from the Rāmāyaṇa ) and *Abhimanyu Kāḷaga* ( from the Bhūrata ). Sri Kerōdi Subbarao speaks very highly of his poetical, literary and dramatic merit. *Rāṅgabhoomi* : Oct. , 1926- pp. 37-40. Shri Kūranth has discussed in great detail the significant composers from the 18th century to the present day. Sivarama Kūranth : Op. cit : P. 215 onwards.

*Kathe*, *Vṛṣabhendra Vilāsa*, *Vara Nandi Kalyāṇa*, and *Karṇa Parva* have been staged by different *mēlas* or troupes in different parts of Mysore. His merited compositions mark him as a poet with a considerable sense of drama.

“At a time when it was the fashion to translate into Kannada plays from Sanskrit, he made a prolific contribution to the Yakṣagāna literature.... The variety of his themes, their adaptability to music, and the grand conception of theme and characterisation earned him the title—*Abhinava Bhōja* from the rulers of Mysore.”<sup>1</sup>

Other composers of the eastern table-land who deserve a mention are Bālakrishna Rao of Shimoga, Tālukina Subbanna of Bellāry, Nanjunda Kavi and K. Venkatarāmayya, both of Mysore.

#### THE BHĀGAVATA :

All the well-known composers have invariably been successful exponents also in the role of the Bhāgavata who is the very vital soul of Yakṣagāna. It is the Bhāgavata who performs the entire work of the chorus of the Greek drama. He moves the story, prompts different characters to appropriate dances, provides a befitting frame-work to the entire performance and motivates the rousing of a sentiment. In addition, he introduces the characters to the audience by asking them questions and also, links up situations with his own commentary. He should have a close understanding of the epics and be equipped with a good voice and a clear sense of the *rāgas* of Karnātak classical music.

The coastal tract of Karnātak has had a number of great exponents—the Bhāgavatas. Pārti Subba, the well-known composer was one such Bhāgavata. Others who made a lasting impression on their times were Benakayya Bhāgavata, Nerampadi Nārāyaṇa Bhāgavata, Sankayya Bhāgavata and Mulike Manjunātha Bhāgavata. In recent times, Subrāya Shānbhāg of Kāsargod and Balipa Nārāyaṇa Bhāgavata are known in the coastal tract for their abilities and talent as exponents. A Bhāgavata would usually know by memory the entire text of forty to fifty *Prabandhas* and would go on with the performance without referring to manuscripts.

#### THE ARTIST :

The Yakṣagāna artist has to satisfy many more requirements than the stage actor who gets away with just some delicate touches of speech and gesture, assisted by the make-up expert, the property man and even the prompter. The Yakṣagāna artist is at once a make-up expert,

1. *The Kannada Stage Centenary Volume* : 1948—pp. 127-128.

a dancer and an effective actor with convincing declamatory powers. He, at the outset, should be strong physically; for the costumes of Yakṣagāna are cumbrous and heavy, its dances vigorous and extraneous. Above all, he should possess great presence of mind and cold common-sense.

As in the case of the actor of the modern stage, the spoken word is not written down for the Yakṣagāna artist. The Bhāgavata recites a verse and presents a theme to the artist to elaborate with his own words and acting. The spoken word is original, spontaneous and extempore. The prompter does not exist in the world of Yakṣagāna. It is this freedom of the artist and absence of any written dialogue that enlivens the performance and makes it new and sustaining every time. The prose interpretation demands that he should be alert every time though he may have played the same role in the same *prabandha* many times before. During a performance he lives in a state of *real* dramatic suspense as he would have no sure chance of knowing what his 'opponent' would say next. This handicap is also the advantage of Yakṣagāna, for it changes the complexion of the dialogue and provides scope for alteration and improvement in characterisation. An artist would achieve the art of acting in Yakṣagāna only after careful observation and meticulous training for years.<sup>1</sup>

But the successful artists enjoyed a high status and honour in the coastal villages, and when they visited cities, they made a lasting impression on the urban audiences.<sup>2</sup> They had a rare understanding of the secrets of acting and

"would compare well with any Indian or Western artist of the professional stage or screen."<sup>3</sup>

1. All the well-known artists of the past studied the secrets of the art for at least ten or twelve years. In the strict traditional manner they would receive tuition and training at the feet of a master regarding the technique of make-up, modes of dancing (*Hejje gali*), symbolic gesture (*Anganyāsa*) and manner of speech. G. R. Pandeshwar—*Yakṣāṇatakada Bhavīṭavya: Kannada Vṛtta* Special Number—1953. p. 4.
2. Yakṣagāna troupes of the coastal tract frequently toured in South India and Mahrāṣṭra. The prominent among them were *Peradur Daśāvātāra Saṅgha* and *Dakṣiṇa Kannada Yakṣagāna Saṅgha*.
3. "ಉಪ್ಪರಳ್ಳಿ ಶೇಷ ಗಣಪತಿ ಪ್ರಭುಗಳು ಕರ್ಣ, ವಾಲಿ, ಶೃಂಗಾರ ರಾವಣ, ಅಂಗರವರು ರುಕ್ಮಾಂಗದ ಪಾತ್ರ ಧರಿಸಿದಾಗ ತಮ್ಮ ಮೂನುಷ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿತ್ವವನ್ನೆಲ್ಲ ಮರೆತು ಆಯಾ ಸನ್ನಿವೇಶಕ್ಕೆ ನುಗುಣವಾಗಿ ಬಿಕ್ಕಿಬಿಕ್ಕಿ ಆತ್ಮದನ್ನೂ ಭಕ್ತಿರಸದಲ್ಲಿ ಕರಗಿ ಮುದ್ದೆಯಾದುದನ್ನೂ ಕಾಮವಿಕಾರದಿಂದ ತೀರ ವಿಪರವಾದುದನ್ನೂ ನಾನು ಅನೇಕ ಸಾರಿ ಕಣ್ಣಾರೆ ಕಂಡಿದ್ದೇನೆ." G. R. Pandeshwar: *Yakṣāṇatakada Bhavīṭavya: 'Kannada Vṛtta'.* Spl. number 1953. p. 4.

Dr. V. Raghavan, while considering the artistic abilities of Ganapati Prabhu, a celebrated actor belonging to *Peradur Daśavātāra Sangha*, paid a compliment to him, saying that he, with his rare command on the art of dance, speech and gesture, would be an equal to many 'Uday Shankars'.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the masters in the art who are remembered even to-day are Kumbale Nāranappa for portraying roles of humour, Kokkarane Ganapati for female roles, Kumbale Mālinga for leading grand roles like Rāvaṇa and Balarāma, and Upparahalli Shesha playing sublime characters like Karna. The legacy of this glorious art is ably borne to-day by experts like Keremane Sivarāma Hegde, Karki Paramayya, Murur Devara Hegde, Brahmāvara Veerabhadra and others in North Canara (*Badagu tittu*), and K. Vittala Sastri, Narayana Bhatta, Dejasetti, Hāladi Rāma and others in South Canara. When a performance of K. Shivarama Hegade or K. Vittal Sastri is witnessed, one feels that Yakṣagāna, in spite of the ravages of time and various pseudo-modern influences, has yet retained the rich traditions of Karnatak and if the art is supported, it would undoubtedly see brighter days.<sup>2</sup>

#### DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF YAKṢAGĀNA:

The coastal region in the west, extending from Goa to the border of Malabār has been divided into two parts, according to the differences in the technique of portrayal of Yakṣagāna. The Yakṣagāna of the northern region, is called the *Badagu tittu* while that of the southern region is known as *Tenku tittu*. Udipi is the demarcating taluka. The Bhāgavat of *Badagu tittu* uses a pair of cymbals (*tāla*) while his counterpart in *Tenku tittu* uses the Gong (*Jāgate Kolu*); the *Mṛdanga* of the North is longer and narrower at the ends giving sharp notes at a high pitch while in the South, the *Mṛdanga* has a greater diameter, giving

1. V. Raghavan : *Yakṣagāna : Jayakarnātaka* Vol. XII. 11, p. 15
2. K. Shivārāma Hegde is known for his portrayal of the role of Duryōdhana. He performed it with commendable skill and understanding in the Kannada Sāhitya Sammelan that met at Kunta in 1954. He is a thin man with a fragile body but on the stage in full make-up and costumes, he occupies it fully, literally and figuratively. Karki Paramayya (Parama Hāsyagara) is about 65 years of age now, but his portrayal of the role of Śambarāsura on the same occasion, with his snappy dance and talking gave thrills to the audience. K. Vittal Sastri, leader of the *Manjunāth Mela* of Dharmasthala recently paid a visit to Hubli with his troupe. His ease and informality is commendable. Shri Mahalingan of the same troupe playing the main opposite role (*Pratināyaka*) and Ramachandrarao who played lady roles—are artists of rare ability.

the base notes of *Kala* and *Mandara* with sounds of *Jhankār* and *Dhinkār*; Chande in the south is used with better proficiency as an accompaniment for rousing even a delicate sentiment like *Srngāra* and subtle dances as *lāsyā* and

“ the reason for this superior exploitation of this powerful percussion instrument in the south is perhaps due to the better efficiency of the southerners in making this instrument. ”<sup>1</sup>

While the performance in the North pays greater attention to acting ( *abhinaya* ), the southern style has specialised in the art and technique of dancing. The Bhāgavata of *Tenku tittu* is a lone singer, while in the north, the Bhāgavata is invariably accompanied by the performing artist also. While the northern Bhāgavata stops singing with the beating of the cymbal, in the south, the Gong ( *Jāgate Kolu* ) continues in three rounds even after the recitation of the Bhāgavata stops, in order to give a finesse to the dance of the character. Finally, the make-up and costumes of the southern style is better in details and more imposing owing to the influence of the methods of Kathakkaḷi. These differences in the performances of *Badagu tittu* and *Tenku tittu* are obviously due to the local and regional influences as well as contacts; but the source and purpose of the performances remain the same and they produce almost the same unity of impression.

*Prasanga*: Yakṣagāna is an open-air play, and it cannot be performed during the monsoons, when, for four months in the year, heavy rains drench the coastal belt. In the absence of a full dress performance of Yakṣagāna in the open-air, the coastal region has evolved an alternative method in what is called *Prasanga* or *Tāḷa Maddale*, an indoor entertainment, closely following the methods laid down by Yakṣagāna. *Prasanga* is a virtual Yakṣagāna performance without the latter's make-up, costumes and dances.

In the presence of an audience assembled in a spacious hall, the Bhāgavata sits in the centre with his accompaniments, and the artists ( *Arthadhāri* as they are called in contrast with *Veṣadhāri* of Yakṣagāna ) sit in front of him in two rows, each opposite to the other. The Bhāgavata selects a particular *Prasanga*, sings the invocation and recites verses as in Yakṣagāna. The verses are interpreted by the artists each of whom assumes a role in the play, though he is not made up, nor costumed for it. Still, the illusion is created, for the participants talk with all the vigour, bearing and understanding of the roles they

1. K. P. Venkappa Shetti : *Presidential address* to the Kumta Sammelan.

portray. The individual entity of the participant recedes into the background and the mythological heroes rise up before the mental eye and the audience enjoy the performance immensely, for after all, the physical eye beholds much less than the mental.

The *Prasanga* concentrates on the literary and emotional exposition of a theme. Compositions like *Kṛṣṇa Sandhāna* and *Angada Sandhāna*, which provide greater scope for literary exposition and imaginative interpretation, are usually selected. The *Prasanga* is an evidence to show that tense dramatic situations and atmosphere could be created without dance or even costumes. What the *Paurāṇik*, the *Kīrtana-kāra* and the *Pāṭhaka* did single-handed is done more ably by a team of learned artists here. The *Prasanga* has more dramatic tension in it than the performance of the *Purāṇika* or *Kīrtanakāra*; but still, it cannot be a *Nātaka* in the correct sense of the word because of the absence of settings, dance, make-up and costumes. It is not improbable however, that

“it is the middle step between the *pravachanakāra* on the one hand and the full-fledged *Yakṣanātaka* on the other in the evolution of the theatre of Karnatak”

as suggested by Prof. Krishnasastri.<sup>1</sup>

#### MŪḌALAPĀYA:

While the *Yakṣagāna* is essentially an indigenous theatrical mode of the coastal tract of Karnatak, the eastern table-land—North Karnatak and Mysore—have evolved a mode of open-air performance called *Mūḍalapāya* or ‘the Method of the East’. The performance is also recognised by the names *Aṭṭadāṭa* which means ‘a performance on the platform’, *Bayalāṭa*, meaning ‘a performance in the open-air’, *Doḍḍāṭa* suggesting that the performance is an imposing play and *Dombi Dāsara Kunita*, apparently, but wrongly suggesting that it is a performance of the *Dāsas*. The performance is roughly on the lines of *Yakṣagāna* itself, but the obvious differences between them in details of production make the two easily distinguishable. In some of the villages of North Karnatak, both *Yakṣagāna* and *Mūḍalapāya* thrived side by side, each performed by specialised parties.<sup>2</sup>

*Mūḍalapāya* has all the essential characteristics of a typical mode of the Folk Theatre with its *Bhāgavata* supported by a chorus called

1. A. R. Krishnasastri: *Sanskṛita Nātaka* p. 39

2. Dr. B. S. Gadgimath has discussed in great detail, the different types of *Bayalātā* in Karnatak: *Prāthamika Śikṣana*, Nov. '55.

*Himmēla*, vigorous dances and music, colourful costumes and make-up and finally, an epical theme and its organic development. The platform in the decorated arena is more spacious than for Yakṣagāna, as it has to accommodate a bigger number of participants who perform wild dances. The performance opens with a prayer to Ganapati, the God of Learning, who appears on the stage to bless the play with success. In Yakṣagāna different characters are introduced to the audience by the Bhāgavata; but Mūdalapāya has a special role called *Sārathi* to do the necessary introduction of the characters and also to provide substantial humour. Every character addresses the *Sārathi* while speaking, and an ingenious *Sārathi* is a liaison between the audience and the stage, interpreting the one to the other. He fills the gap between the exit of one role and the entrance of another. Witty as he is, he often indulges in humorous conversation even with the audience. The *Sārathi* is usually assisted by *Kodangi* the jester.

The grandeur of the performance is in the costumes, dance, acting and talking of the main character called *Baṇṇada Vēṣa*. The main artist is usually painted and dressed up at his own residence or the village office (*chāvadi*), fully attended to by the village experts. He wears fabulous costumes in deep colours. He wears a cloth embroidered in gold (*peetūmbara*) in *Veeragasha* (dhoti worn like a heroic 'girdle') *Tōlapavade* (silken pads for the wrists), *Kanchidāma* (broad waist belt), *Kavacha* (upper garment), *Kireeta* (crown for the head), numerous necklaces, pads and a flowing robe at the back. Heavy jingles are tied around the ankles over the socks. He is laden with scores of artificial ornaments above the waist and is made to look most imposing. He is brought in a procession with oil torches on either side, led by the village band party—*Olaga*. Whenever the procession halts on the road, the artist performs a round of wild dance with intermittent war cries. After he is brought and seated in the lone chair on the platform, villagers make gifts to him 'in homage'. He is then prompted by the chorus into action; a cracker is exploded and he springs to his feet. Heroic roles like Bheema, Dhuryodhana, Rāvaṇa and Hiraṇyakaśipu are presented in the most imposing make-up and costumes. These characters, and sometimes even minor roles like Hanumān and Śūrpanakhi rush forward and jump up to the platform after taking a few hops through the audience, all the while emitting loud shrieks. The polish and finesse of the Yakṣagāna make-up is missing in Mūdalapāya, but the emotional intensity is carried to its climax by the wildness of the war-dances.

The performers of Mūdalapāya are mostly illiterate and unimaginative when compared with the Yakṣagāna artists, and so, their performance may look more physical than intellectual. Unlike the prose in Yakṣagāna, the prose here is invariably memorised; a prose that is heavy with Sanskrit words and strings of deliberate alliteration.<sup>1</sup> The prose structure is tight, involved and elongated, consisting of words that can provide scope for the over stressing of the letters T and D. Compositions of Mūdalapāya are in prose unlike those of Yakṣagāna.

Mūdalpāya provides humour in a large measure but it may sound crude and often physical unlike the literary and chaste humour in Yakṣagāna.<sup>2</sup> The dance in Mūdalapāya looks more fantastic, the music more monotonous in spite of the supporting chorus, and the costumes are often too gaudy. Its themes, though drawn from the epics, seem to lack the *Bhakti* element which is the main stay of Yakṣagāna. Yet, when it is performed by an experienced troupe, the Mūdalapāya of North Karnatak can create a fantastic atmosphere. It is true that with its war-cries, wild dances, and fantastic language, the Mūdalapāya sometimes impresses as far more thrilling than Yakṣagāna.

Recently, during these fifty years, Mūdalapāya seems to have been much influenced by the methods of professional stage. Unlike the stage

1. 'ಬಭ್ರುವಾಹನ ಕಾಳಗ'ದಲ್ಲಿನ ಭೀಮ ಸಾರಥಿಯರ ಸಂವಾದ :

ಸಾರಥಿ : ಅಯ್ಯ ನೀನು ಧಾರು ?

ಭೀಮ : ಎಲೈ ರಂಗದ್ವಜ್ರಮಣಿಯೇ, ಗಾಂಗೇಯ ಸಂಘಟಿತ ಶೃಂಗಾರ ಸಭಾರಂಗಣ ಪ್ರಾಂಗಣದೊಳ ಅಂಗಜವತನ ಹಿಂಗದೆ ಧ್ಯಾನಿಸುವ ಮಂಗಳಾತ್ಮಕ ನೀನು ಧಾರು ?

ಸಾರಥಿ : ಅಯ್ಯ ನೀನು ಧಾರು ?

ಭೀಮ : ಧರ್ಮ ಗುಣಕಲಾಪ, ಭೂಪಕುಲದೀಪ, ಸತ್ತತಾಪ ,ಭವನ್ಮಾರು ದೇರದೊಳ ಕಪ್ಪುಕಾಣಿಕೆಯಂ ಮೆಪ್ಪುಗೊಂಡಿಪ್ಪ ರಾಯರ ತಲೆಚಿಪ್ಪುಗಳು ಗಪ್ಪನೆ ಉದುರುವಂತೆ ಚಪ್ಪಳಿಸಿ ಕೆಡಗಿದ ಕಡುಶಾರ್ಙ್ಗಧೀರನಲ್ಲದೆ ಹೆಕ್ಕಳಿಬಲದಿ ಕದನಕ್ಕೆ ಬಂದ ಬಕ ಹಿಡಂಬ ರಕ್ತಸರ ಕಕ್ಕಿಸಿ ಧಿಕ್ಕರಿಸಿ, ಒಕ್ಕಲಿಕ್ಕಿ ದಿಕ್ಕುಪಾಲ್ ಮಾಡಿ ಕ್ಕಿದ ಪ್ರಚಂಡ ಭಂಡನೋದ್ಘಾಮ ಹರಿಬಲವಿರಾಮ ಭೀಮಶೇನನೆಂದು ಢಣ ಢಣಲ್ ಎಂದು ಜಯಭೇರಿಯಂ ಬಡಿಸಲ್ಪೆ ಧೂತ-ಸಾಖ್ಯಪ್ರದಾತ-

ಕಾಮತಪ್ತಳಾದ ರಾಜಪುತ್ರಿ ಸಖಿಗೆ ಹೇಳುವ ಮಾತುಗಳು :

ರೇ ರೇ ಗೆಳತಿ ನಳಿನನಾಭನ ದಯದಿ ಇಳಿಯರಸನ ದಯವು ನನ್ನವೇಲಿರಲು ಬಳಲಿಕೆಯ ಬಿಟ್ಟು ತಳಿರಶಯ್ಯೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಪವಡಿಸಲು ಕೊರತೆಯೇನಮ್ಮಾ ಸಹಚರೀ-ಪುಷ್ಪ ರಸಪಾನಮತ್ತ ಬಾಲಭ್ರಮರೇ.

2. Sometimes there would be an overweight of crude humour ( of Sārathi ) crushing the dignity of the leading character with repartees like—

ಸಾರಥಿ : ಎಲೈ ಭೂಪ—ಸುಡಗಾಡಗಟ್ಟಾಗಿನ ದೀಪ

ಬುದ್ಧಿ-ಅಟ್ಟದ ಕೆಳಗೆ ಬಿದ್ದುಗಿದ್ದಿ.

ರಾಜ : ಎಲೈ ಸಾರಥಿ, ಹೊಲಸ ನಾರತೀ

ಬುಡಕ ಬೀಳತಿ ಎನ ಹೇಳತಿ ?

of Yakṣagana, the platform is covered on three sides and has oddly painted curtains, two of them usually. Even the costumes and make-up reveal a pronounced alien influence. The age old *Panju* (oil torch) is replaced by the petromax, *Pungi* the accompaniment, by the harmonium and finally, the fundamental vigour expressed in dance and war-cries seems to have faded out considerably. Yet even to-day, on a festive occasion, if the Doddāta of *Rāmānya* (Rāmāyaṇa) is announced, the entire village including even the old and the sick will assemble and enjoy every bit of the long performance that bridges the dusk with the dawn. After all, 'the audience is half the play'.

It is because of the rustic crudeness witnessed in the performance that Mūḍalapāya is considered to be more ancient than Yakṣagāna.<sup>1</sup> It is compared with the open air performance of Ancient Greece because of some of the identical characteristics—like the absence of settings and scenery on the stage, the composition and function of the chorus, the heroic themes and non-commercial nature of both.<sup>2</sup> Mūḍalapāya is considered by some scholars to be the most typical of *Prakṛt* performances that influenced the early Sanskrit Drama, supplying some of its theatrical modes and basic roles which later came to be called *Sootradhāra* and *Pāripārśhwaka* who "later still, assumed names like *Vidūṣaka*, *Vita* and *Shakāra*."<sup>3</sup>

The suggestion is significant, but excepting for the comparative crudity of the performance, there is no other tangible evidence in support of placing Mūḍalapāya far earlier to Yakṣagāna in antiquity, nor is there any material evidence to conclude that Yakṣagāna is the outcome of Mūḍalapāya or the other way about. The Refinement of the one and the crudity of the other may essentially be due to environmental influences. Secondly, there are more differences than similarities between the ancient Greek plays and Mūḍalapāya. The characters of Greek plays wore masks, while these are unknown to Mūḍalapāya; the Greek play reached its greatest heights in tragedy, a form unknown to the Karnataka folk play; the three unities were an accepted ideal for the Greek dramatist, while the Karnataka folk playwright had no corresponding ideal before him. The disparity between the two would indicate the absence of any influence of the one on the other though there was a close contact (mostly commercial) between Ancient Greece and South

1. M. G. Venkateśayya: *Aṭṭadāta.-Rangabhoomi*: Vol. IV. pp. 7 and 9. Vol. V. p. 8

2. M. G. Venkateśayya: *Ibid. Rangabhoomi* Vol. IV. 9 pp. 146-147

3. *Rangabhoomi*-March 1929. pp. 110-115

India. The theatrical modes of the two countries were obviously evolved independently: any similarity between the two in the theatrical pattern or procedure could only be ascribed to accident.

The opinion that Mūḍalapāya, more than Yakṣagāṇa, has contributed concepts to the creation and development of Sanskrit drama deserves some consideration, for it is probable, as suggested before, that Sanskrit drama owes not a little to the then prevailing Prakṛt mode of performances of South India and possibly of Karnatak. But the absence of any substantial evidence prevents Mūḍalapāya claiming an earlier antiquity to Yakṣagāṇa and so, it cannot be said that it was Mūḍalapāya and not Yakṣagāṇa that influenced Sanskrit drama. Except in a few details already discussed, both these modes resemble each other in their methods of presentation, purpose and fulfilment. They seem to be two forms of the same Prakṛt performance and branches of the same theatre, developing differently in different environments. As there is no clear imprint of the distinguishable characteristics of the one, more than of the other on Sanskrit drama, we cannot say which of them influenced Sanskrit drama more than the other. Even in modern times each is as popular as the other and as effective on different audiences.

#### KṚṢṆA PĀRIJĀTA:

A theatrical mode that has still held the village stage of North Karnatak even in the age of the cinema is Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta, a much refined form of Doddāta popularised by a folk poet and artist by name Kulgod Timmanṇa of Gokak Taluk.

Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta is said to have been originally written by an earlier folk-poet by name Aparāla Tammanna of Raichur in Hyderabad Karnatak, who lived in the early years of the 19th century. The original composition which is full of verses exhibits a pronounced influence of Yakṣagāṇa. Many years later, Kulgod Timmanṇa, who was deeply influenced by the Yakṣagāṇa performances of the visiting troupes from the coastal tract, took up the old composition of Aparāla Tammanna in order to evolve an equally successful indigenous theatrical mode in North Karnatak. He touched up the original play here and there, added his own lyrics, collected his friends and staged it as a *drama*. The experiment was a great success; the village audiences felt that a new form had been created. Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta received a great welcome and the troupe of Kulgod Timmanṇa 'received invitations from every village in North Karnatak.'<sup>1</sup>

1. Betgeri Krishna Sarma : *Jayanti* p. 355.

The success of Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta was due to the keen theatrical insight of Timmanṇa who retained its love-theme but changed the mode of its presentation. Modern touches of popular Marathi light music were given to the songs; the characters themselves were made to sing their respective songs though the traditional chorus was retained. Modern instruments like tabla, sarangi and harmonium were introduced; better attention was given to the frame work of the play, the stage, make-up and costumes, and finally, women-artists were introduced in to the performance.<sup>1</sup> These significant alterations marked the performance as a new experiment which catered to the changing tastes of people who were slowly acquainting themselves with the urban professional plays. Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta marked a mile-stone in the progress of the theatre from the folk to the professional phase.

#### SANNĀTA:

A mode later to Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta is *Sannāta* so called to distinguish it from the well-known *Dodḍāta*. *Sannāta* is virtually a drama set in traditional folk patterns but bearing the influences of professional drama, particularly with regard to the stage, settings, make-up and dialogues. *Sannāta* is about fifty years old and is popular in the villages of North Karnatak because of the impressive performances by the teams that came from the Belgaum and Dharwar districts, particularly from villages like Narendra and Kelgeri.

*Sannāta* combines in itself the salient features of both the traditional folk performance and the more recent commercial productions. It is based essentially on *moral* and philosophical themes, but not usually drawn from mythologies. It does not lay emphasis on gorgeous costumes, make up or dances as *Dodḍāta* does, though the procedure of production is the same and in fact, it looks a much simplified edition of *Dodḍāta*. The platform set for *Sannāta* is a regular stage covered on three sides and equipped with curtains. Like *Dodḍāta*, it is a full-length performance that runs for about six hours. It opens with songs by the chorus in praise of Ganapati,<sup>2</sup> Īṣhwara<sup>3</sup> and Saraswati.<sup>4</sup> The chorus joins the leader only in singing *Arakālī* the

1. Kaujalagi Ningasani was one of the reputed lady-artists of Kṛṣṇa Pārijāta. She formed her own troupe later and toured the cities and villages of Karnatak after 1890.

2. ಬಾ ಗಜವದನ ಇಡೊ ಕರುಣಾ | ಮೂಷಕ ಧೀರ ವಾಸುಕಿ ಹಾರ

3. ನಮಿಸುವೆ ಈಶ ಹಿಮಗಿರಿ ವಾಸ | ಯಮ ಮದ ನಾಶ-ಶ್ರೀ ಸರ್ವೇಶ

4. ತಾಯೆ ಸರಸ್ವತಿ ಮಾಡತೆನೆ ಸ್ತುತಿ | ಕೊಡ ಮತಿ ನನಗ ನೀವ ಗತಿ

opening lines of the song at the end of each stanza, the actor also singing the while along with the Bhāgavata. The Jester is present but with a different name, *Lālu*, introducing to the audience, different characters of the play as each enters the stage. The actor performs an occasional dance but not with the vigour or intensity of the artist of Yaksagāna or Doddāta. He performs three rounds of short dances called *Chalti* at specific moments in the play, while the Bhāgavata sings in different *tāls* like *Tritāl*, *Ektāl* and *Jhampetāl*. Cymbals, tabla, harmonium and the recently acquired violin are the accompanying instruments. A speciality of the performance is the playing of the instruments at *different rhythms* at the *same time*, all joining together in unison at the final climax, synchronising with a short dance by the chief actor. Its music contains a fair mixture of rāgas like *Bhairavi* and *Multāni* of Hindusthani music in addition to a few popular tunes taken from stage plays.

A fundamental difference between Sannāta and other folk plays is that it is being a *written* play in prose with interspersing verses. The Sannata artist, again, emphasises 'acting' with exaggerated gestures, which accompany the spoken word. The performance provides no scope for the actor to react or speak extempore, as it is a regularly rehearsed drama with the actor fully memorising his long prose passages running sometimes to three pages without an interruption. As is typical with the folk theatre, the playwright is not usually known though the plays theme selves are recent in origin and are quite popular. The script of the play is usually sold from one party to another on payment of an amount ranging from Rs. 15/- to Rs. 50/-, depending on the popularity of the play. Some of the very popular Sannāta plays are *Allama Prabhu*, *Satyāśeela*, *Kabirdās* and *Jodbāi* and they stress the moral and philosophical aspects of life. The performance provides a conflict between the good and evil forces and drives home the triumph of the former.<sup>1</sup> During a musical duet, both the artists playing opposite roles dance *differently*, yet synchronising with the tunes and rhythm patterns provided by the chorus.

1. The usual stress is laid on the chastity of woman and on the triumph of spiritual powers. The performance preaches, in simple words, a practical morality. A musical dialogue between Satyāśeela, an enlightened monk and Tāra, the young wife of an aged man runs as..

ತಾರಾ : ಕಂಡು ನಾನಿನ್ನ ಸುಂದರ ಕಾಯ | ಹೇ ಪ್ರಿಯ

ಮನ್ನಥ ಸ್ಮರಿಸುವುದಿಲ್ಲ ಛಾಯ ಹೊಂದಿದೆ ನಾ ಭ್ರಮೆಯ

ಬಿಟ್ಟು ಈ ಸನ್ಯಾಸ, ಅಗು ಎನ್ನರಸ

ನನಗಾಗಿ ಬಿಟ್ಟನೋ ಅನ್ನೋದಕದಾಶ.....ಚಲಿ.

(Contd. P.72)

Saṇṇāta also has some of the traditional elements of the folk stage like *Pūrvarangā*, the Bhāgavata with his chorus and some dance, music and stock characters like *Lālu*.

Its departing from folk traditions is seen in the method of delivering the prose with exaggerated gesture and also in the make up and settings, which closely resemble the ways of professional productions. The artist is given no liberty with his words. Saṇṇāta thus shifts the emphasis from the actor to the playwright; it is in this sense a precursor of the new stage. The method of make-up also marks a transition from the folk theatre to the modern theatre. The actor paints himself like the professional actor without attending to the elaborate working of his features as in Doddāta. He does not wear *Kireṇṇa*, the crown, *Bhuja-Keerti*, the shoulder blade, and other ornaments. The leading role wears a gown and the inevitable pair of socks. The jester wears a loose loin cloth, a jubba and a mundāsa, a head-dress, all in contrasting colours. The lady of the play receives better attention here than in Yakṣagāna or Doddāta. She<sup>1</sup> wears a wig, an imposing saree and heavy necklaces. Thus, with the comparatively modern make-up and an emphasis on the script, Saṇṇāta looks a virtual stage drama bridging the village Doddāta and the urban professional performances. With its historical theme and lofty moral tone as the sustaining aspects of the show, Saṇṇāta is still popular in the villages of North Karnatak.

#### THE FOLK THEATRE OF MYSORE AREA :

It is strange indeed, that Mysore which made a grand contribution to the professional theatre did not evolve any original folk mode, possibly because its needs were catered to by the Doddāta, played in the same pattern as in the North Karnatak and by the visiting Yakṣagāna troupes from the coastal tract, particularly from the *Tenku Tittu*. Royal patronage was extended to Yakṣagāna troupes from the times of king Kanṭirava Narasārāja as mentioned by Govinda Vaidya. Later, the Mysore Palace received a Yakṣagāna troupe from Dharmasthala in the

ಸತ್ಯಶೀಲ : ಕೋಮಲಾಂಗಿ ನಾನಿರುವೆ ಶಿವಯೋಗಿ | ಗುರುತಾಗಿ  
ಜ್ಞಾನದಿಂದ ಸಂಸಾರಸುಖ ಅಗಿದೇನೆ ನಿಷ್ಕಂಕಿ  
ನೀನಿರುವೆ ಪರಸತಿ ನಾನಿರುವೆ ವರಯತಿ  
ಬೇಡ ಇಂಥ ದುಷ್ಕೃತಿ ನನ್ನೊಳು ಸುದತಿ.....ಜಲ್ಲಿ.

Such paralleled pictures of moral and immoral characters are provided in almost all the Saṇṇāta plays like *Allama Prabhu* (Allama Prabhu's advice to Māye) and *Kabirdās* (advice of Beebi, wife of Kabir to the impetuous Madana).

1. It is always a he.

year 1812 and persuaded it to make Mysore its home. Again in 1867, Mummadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar wrote to Manjappa Hegde of Dharmasthala asking for some expert artists to replenish the palace troupe. Aliya Lingaraj Urs (1822-1874) of the Royal family wrote as many as sixty compositions of Yakṣagāna, rehearsed and got 'many of them' staged by the *Daśavatāra mēla* of the palace, at Kudure Totti of the palace in the Royal presence and at his own residence. The court performances of Yakṣagāna provided no access to the common man but it did lead the way and inspired many a *Daśavatāra Mēla* both in the cities and villages of Mysore State—particularly in Sagar, Chitaldurg and Kolar. Since then a number of poets wrote *Yakṣagāna Prabandhas*. The prominent of them—apart from Aliya Lingaraj Urs are Tippannārya (author of *Sundara Kānda*, *Hanumadvilāsa* and other prabandhas), K. Anantharamaiah (*Bāla Leele*, *Bāṇāsura Kathe* and others), V. Pattanna (*Dhruva Charitre*, *Nala Charite* and others), Subbaraya (*Kariya Bhaṇṭana Kathe*, *Karṇārajuna Kālaga* and others) and Rama Shastri (*Jalandhara Kālaga*, *Chora Kathe* and others). The Mysore performances closely resembled the methods of the Yakṣagāna of *Tenku tittu*, though they lacked the impressive costumes and vigorous dances of the coastal performers. The *Prasanga* or *Tāla Maddale* also was performed on festive occasions, particularly in the city temples, while the villages fell back up on the age-old *Dodḍāta* for their entertainment.

#### THE FUTURE OF THE FOLK THEATRE:

These various modes of the folk theatre have preserved themselves in spite of the damage done to them by changing tastes through times. Yakṣagāna and *Dodḍāta* in particular, provide a golden link between the past and the present phases of the theatre-arts in Karnatak. What Professor Nicoll observed of English plays in the mediaeval age, fits ideally in this case also.

“There is freshness of fancy here, a free treatment of material, a rich fund of humour and at times a true sense of the profound and the tragic.”<sup>1</sup>

They appealed to the masses indeed, and they charmed the classes too.

Yet, when a performance of Yakṣagāna is watched to-day, it brings a conflict in the mind of the spectator about its future, for, it has lost some of its vitals like the oil torch that created a convincing

1 A. Nicoll: *British Drama*, p. 29.

dream-land, the indigenous instruments like *Pungi* and *Mukhaveena* which gave a rich native tone, the vast learning and meticulous training of both the Bhāgavata and the actors which gave a sublime touch to the performance, and more than all, it has lost to a considerable degree, its original pattern of presentation,<sup>1</sup> its dance in varied rhythms and even its elaborate make-up and imposing costumes. While the Southern Style, *Tenku Tittu* is clearly influenced by the methods and make-up of Kathakkali “and has become impure”, its counterpart in the *Badagu Tittu* seems to have taken after the professional drama. The worst among its acquisitions seem to be the harmonium,<sup>2</sup> a kind of loose talking often indulged in, and the very misfitting themes.<sup>3</sup> With these, the future of Yakṣagāna looked rather dim and dismal a few years ago.

Many an art-critic and well-wisher of the theatre of Karnatak expressed concern about the future of this colourful mode and blamed for its decay, the sense of realism that was creeping into the soul of Yakṣagāna. He warned against its hanging as a handmaid of *Śāstra*, *Pāṇḍitya* or even *Nāṇḍitya*.<sup>4</sup>

Critics wrote deploring ‘the lack of taste and patronage on the part of the public and also a careful study and strenuous training on the part of the artist.’<sup>5</sup>

They called on the living masters to give training with a free mind, and every one demanded the eradication of sophistication and esoterism. Attention on the part of the artist and consideration and patronage on the part of the Government and the public was invited,

“without which, this glorious art would soon find its grave and pass into history.” It was no doubt a warning given in a much exaggerated tone—but a warning all the same, which deserved serious consideration.

1. Some of the old characters like *Ardhanārī*, *Chappara Muncha*, *Strī Veśa* and even *Purva Raṅga* is shed.
2. ‘For every discordant musical note heard in India to-day, the harmonium should be blamed’. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya: *Kalā* Sept. 1931. p. 107.
3. “ಇತ್ತೀಚಿನ ಕವಿಗಳು ಅಕ್ಷರ, ಪ್ರತಾಪಸಿಂಹ, ರಾಜಸಿಂಹ ಇನ್ನೇ ಅಲ್ಲ ಮಹಾಯುದ್ಧದ ಹಿಟ್ಟರ ಗೋರಿಂಗರನ್ನೂ ತಂದು ಯಕ್ಷಗಾನ ಪ್ರಬಂಧ ರಚನೆ ಮಾಡಿದ್ದಾರೆ.”  
—ಕಿವರಾಮ ಕಾರಂಜ—ಯಕ್ಷಗಾನದ ಕಥೆಗಳು ಮತ್ತು ಶೈಲಿ,  
ಜಯಂತಿ ಜುಲೈ ೧೯೫೨, ಪುಟ ೪೯
4. Shivarama Karanth: *Yakṣagānada Punarujjivevāna*—*Karmaveera Annual*—1949. p. 29.
5. G. R. Pandeshwar: *Yakṣanāṭakada Bhavitavya: Kannada Vritta*: 26th Dec., 1953. p. 5. Hasanagi: *Yakṣanāṭakagalu*, p. 93.

As a result or as a coincidence, it is heartening however, that there is a new awareness all round. There is a new enthusiasm to witness, understand and estimate the folk theatre, particularly its Yakṣagāna. The awakening is a happy augury, as it sets the active minds on thinking about the great art, its problems and its future. Yakṣagāna has attracted the attention of administrators, artists, the learned and the layman,<sup>1</sup> and seems to have convinced them of its greatness as a theatrical art which should be preserved at all cost.

The question is about the compromise of the traditional Yakṣagāna with the changing tastes. All along it has lived mostly on the patronage of temples and has remained a *religious art*.<sup>2</sup> The original significance attached to the temple with its reduced financial strength, is weakened in modern times and so, Yakṣagāna cannot depend entirely on temples any longer. It has to be maintained by the society which should make it a medium of a common man's education and entertainment.

It would be profitless to suggest that Yakṣagāna should be preserved in its very original form, for it would be impracticable; but it has to preserve, as far as possible, its original grain by recreating its lost characters, by preserving the tradition of its make-up and costumes, by maintaining its dance and music, and in fact, by keeping all its original paraphernalia. It has to make an effort to become the entertainment of city-audiences also by cutting short its duration and trimming up the performance. It can take advantage of the modern amenities without in any way suffering in the soul.

Whether Yakṣagāna should become a commercial entertainment is another consideration discussed by some critics. The economic advantages are obvious.<sup>3</sup> But then, the art may have to cater to the taste of its patronisers *on an obligation*, and also at the cost of its own soul.<sup>4</sup> It would be a certain danger to get into an obligation with the

1. For the first time a *Yakṣanātaka Goṣṭi* was organised under the auspices of the 36th Kannada Literary Conference convened at Kumta in December, 1953. For the first time again, a Yakṣagāna troupe (The Hāsyagāra Mela of Karki) went to Delhi and staged shows at the Kannada Cultural Conference early in 1954. The President, the Prime Minister of India, and the Delhi public witnessed the shows and applauded them.
2. Even to-day, the good form of some of the troupes is owing to the financial aid provided by temples to which they are attached—as at Dharmasthala Peraduru, Mandarti, Māranekatte, Hiriyaḍka, Hālādi, Bappanādu, Mulki and Idagunji.
3. G. R. Pandeshwar : *Yakṣanāṭakada Bhavitaṇya : Kannada Vṛitta*—26th Dec., 1953. p. 4.

audience ( unless fully prepared for self-adjustment ) and to cater to its taste which is neither constant nor dependable. No art can remain pure and yet become a commercial success for all times, and it is particularly true regarding the folk art and its theatre which, if ceases to remain pure, ceases also to be a typical folk art that lives for its own sake. The question then, of its prosperous future should be decided by social patronage and the art's own appeal.

The opening of a *Kalā Kendra* or a Teaching Faculty is imminent; a *Kalā Kendra* that can bring together the expert, the student and the critic in order to preserve and foster the art. It may be run on the lines of *Kalāmandalam* of Kathakkaḷi at Cheruthuruthy in Travancore-Cochin which worked so efficiently under the inspiring guidance of the Poet Laureate Vallathol. It may work in other directions also, like collecting manuscripts, costumes, ornaments and weapons of the Yakṣagāna of olden times, and thus become a Research centre of the folk theatre. An annual festival of Yakṣagāna and Doddāta performances staged by troupes, drawn from all over the Kannada land, will flip the art into a better condition. Efficient troupes must also be made to go round the country, staging shows and creating a taste for the folk theatre of Karnatak.

It is in these rural performances of Yakṣagāna and Doddāta, the seeds of the professional theatre and modern drama lay. If there is some art that is indigenous and typical of Karnatak, as indigenous and typical as its music and temple, it is Yakṣagāna and its counterpart—Doddāta. Yakṣagāna can safely remain the pride of Karnatak, comparing favourably with any other mode of Indian folk theatre; the *Yātra* of Bengal, the *Rasadhāri* of Mathura and the *Rāma Leela* of Upper India. With its spoken word, it has an advantage even over its counterpart in Malabar, the acclaimed Kathakkaḷi. If not for its great past as the unrivalled University of the common man, imparting light and delight, for its own future as a lofty institution of the indigenous folk theatre of Karnatak, it has to be preserved in its purity and rustic glory, for, ' though it has already borne remarkable fruit, it is indeed yet capable of bearing more and richer '.

1. The *Manjmath Yakṣanātāk Mandali* of Dharmasthala led by K. Vittala Sāstri staged impressive performances at Hubli on tickets. The show would start at 9.30 p. m. and go on till 1.00 a. m., when suddenly, realising the late hour for the city, the show would be concluded with the final battle scene, quite unceremoniously, in contrast with the elaborate *Poorvaranga*. Still, the shows were well responded to.

## IV THE PROFESSIONAL STAGE

### THE MODERN THEATRE :

Professional theatre, the theatre run by professional artists is known as the 'Modern Theatre' and 'Commercial Theatre' in order to distinguish it from the ancient Hindu Theatre (Sanskrit) and also to emphasise the new commercial aspect of the professional theatre. The idea of taking to the theatre as a profession was comparatively recent in India, largely due to the western influence. The tradition in ancient India was that the actor was always something else in profession; an agriculturist perhaps, acting on the Folk stage, and a learned pandit in the Court Theatre. Plays were staged in devotion to gods in the temple in the former case (*Ranga Pooja*), and as an entertainment to the royal court in the latter. Thus, there is no evidence of the existence in the past, of a 'professional stage' in the modern sense. The financial aspect of the theatre was never treated with any significance because a troupe which played the drama in the court or in the temple, usually came to be constituted just for that show, and whatever expenses incurred in that connection, were met by the patron—be it the court or temple.

### THE THEATRE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS :

Like any other commodity, even a fine art like music and painting began to fetch a price in the modern industrial age, where money occupied an important place in all social and cultural undertakings. Money became the measure of the value of everything including skill, art and literature, resulting in new social values. Status made way for contract in life and contract shaped everything into classified professions. Theatre could not remain an exception. Another result of the industrial age was the outcome of the middle class. As the latter grew in bulk, new methods and means of entertainment had to be evolved, and this called for a mode of theatre that was different from both the folk stage and the court stage, which catered to the rural audiences on the one hand and the courtiers on the other, but not to the middle link—the middle class. Till that time came which marked the birth and growth of the influential middle class, the need for a third type of theatre was not felt. That perhaps is one of the reasons why the

history of the professional theatre in India does not go back even to a hundred years. During the hundred years of its recent history, the professional theatre has mainly depended on the middle class for its support. The desire of the middle class to have an entertainment for which it was prepared to *pay* a price,—for that was the accepted vogue in an age of contract—worked the professional theatre into a reality.

#### A LINK BETWEEN THE FOLK AND COURT THEATRES:

The new professional theatre proved to be a link between the folk and the court theatres, for it imbibed the salient features of both of them to evolve itself. While its advent gradually routed out the court theatre out of existence, the court itself did not loose its entertainment, for it readily found a suitable or even more agreeable substitute in the professional theatre itself, which could assure more broad based and better entertainment not only to the court audiences but also to the folk audiences with equal relish. The new theatre drew all the three stratas of the society together, but depended mainly on the middle class for its maintenance. The middle class did not much relish the folk play and had no access to the court play, and therefore, it welcomed with open arms, the professional stage when it came.

#### BEGINNING IN INDIA: CALCUTTA—

The Modern Theatre of India is very young when compared with the professional theatre in other countries. The professional ballet dancers of France who were influenced by the Spanish professional dancers toured England in the early years of the 18th century. England had a flourishing stage with a number of 'rival professional performers' at the close of the 17th century. Japan had a regular professional theatre at Yeddo in the year 1624. But the first Indian professional players came up in Calcutta after the rebuilding of a 'play house' with the help of public subscription in the year 1775-76.

"These English theatres which were fast becoming commercial, filled the minds of rich landlords with great ideas. At the heavy cost of two lakhs of rupees (£ 13,000/-) the popular mediæval Drama *Vidyā Sundar* was acted by men and women in 1835."<sup>1</sup>

A number of similar attempts were made at fabulous expenses and a taste for drama was inspired and established. These efforts culmi-

1. R. K. Yajnik: *The Indian Theatre*. p. 85.

nated in the establishment of a public theatre for the middle class. This was the National Theatre that came into being in 1872, 'the first regular theatre in which actors received salary, and tickets were sold to the public'.

#### IN BOMBAY:

Conditions in Bombay presented a note-worthy contrast to those prevailing in Calcutta, for the 'modern theatre' of Bombay did not owe much to European influence. Parsis, 'the most intelligent minority in India', brought with them Persian artistic traditions and developed them in India. "In a sense *they* are the pioneers of the modern theatre in Bombay both in the amateur and professional fields." Though Bombay also had, as early as in 1770, a play-house where a number of English plays were produced, the real history of the professional theatre in Western India begins in the year 1842 when a play-house built by Jagannāth Shankar Seth, became available for European and Indian productions at a fixed daily rent. Karnatak had to wait for 30 years after this to see the birth of its professional stage.

The year 1850 is 'memorable in the annals of the western Indian stage, for that marked the birth of the Marathi drama at the hands of Vishnupant Bhave, one of the gifted clerks of the Chief of Sangli'. After the demise of their patron, the Bhave players turned professional, called themselves *Sanglikar Sangīta Nāṭaka Maṇḍalī* and began to tour Maharashtra and Karnatak. After 1851, the Bhave players went to Bombay, introduced into their presentation the costly settings and costumes of the Parsi and English shows of the day, and became highly popular. Soon sprang up a number of rival professional groups in Maharashtra. Every important city like Sangli, Miraj, Kolhapur and Ichalkaranji saw the birth of a troupe which tried to go one better than the great Sangaliker Company which had earned for Maharashtra a new mode of theatre. All these professional troupes made frequent visits to North Karnatak soon after 1855. Tempted by the success of Marathi professional troupes in North Karnatak, Parsi companies, including the well known Victoria Parsi Company of Batliwalla, started visiting North Karnatak, Mysore and Andhra.

#### THE PROFESSIONAL STAGE IN NORTH KARNATAK:

In a short while, Marathi professional plays became the rage over the whole of North Karnatak: interest in the coastal Yaksagāna troupes began to wane. This resulted in a feeling of frustration in the

Kannada intelligentsia who saw Kannada audiences rushing to see Marathi plays, often without even understanding their language. It looked as though, in the onrush of the Marathi stage, Kannada drama had been forgotten. The intelligentsia set out to revive the old Kannada stage, and to create a new one out of it if possible. But first, Karnatak had to have its own commercial stage. One of the many that came to this inevitable conclusion in the 1870s was Sakkari Bālāchārya, popularly known as Śāntakavi. Śāntakavi was born in 1856, breathing the fresh air of patriotism and a new regional consciousness that had set the people thinking about their own lost traditions and culture.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of his urge to take up his pen against the incursions of the Marathi stage, Śāntakavi says that the Kannada play was swept off the stage in Karnatak.<sup>2</sup> The Marathi stage became rich at the expense of Karnatak. There was a hopeless pessimism 'all over the Dharwar area' as regards the potentialities of the Kannada language. Kannadigas themselves declared that their language was harsh, amorphous and uninspiring, and that it had no drama, no actors, not even the hope of having them in the future.<sup>3</sup> This frustration resulted in a spirit of challenge. The challenge of the Marathi stage could be met only by a revival of the indigenous theatrical art of Karnatak. Śāntakavi fell back on the very Yakṣagāṇa which had provided the

1. “ಬಂಡಾಯವೆಂದು ಕರೆಯಲ್ಪಡುವ ಸ್ವಾತಂತ್ರ್ಯಯುದ್ಧವೆಂಬ ನೇಗಿಲದಿಂದ (ಭಾರತ ಭಾಗ್ಯವಿಧಾತನು) ಹಿಂದೂಸ್ಥಾನ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರರುದ್ಧಿಯನ್ನು ನಡೆಸಿದ್ದನು. ಇಂಥ ಸಂಧಿ ಕಾಲಕ್ಕೆ ೧೫ನೇ ಜನವರಿ ೧೮೫೬ ಪಿಂಗಳನಾಮ ಸಂವತ್ಸರದಲ್ಲಿ ಶಾಂತಕವಿಗಳು ಕರ್ಣಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿ ಜನ್ಮವೆತ್ತಿದರು. ಅಲ್ಲಿಂದ ಮುಂದೆ ೧೦-೧೫ ವರುಷಗಳೊಳಗೇ ಭಾರತಕ್ಕೆ ಭೂಷಣವನ್ನು ತಂದಿರುವ ಎಲ್ಲ ಮಹಾತ್ಮರು ಬೇರೆ ಬೇರೆ ಪ್ರಾಂತಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಅವತರಿಸಿರುವರು.

ದ. ಲಾ. ಬೇಂದ್ರೆ—, ಶಾಂತಕವಿಗಳೂ ಅವರ ಕಾಲವೂ

—‘ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಸಂಶೋಧನೆ’ ಪುಟ ೧೭೨.

2. ಎಲ್ಲಿನೋಡಲು ಮರಾಠಿಯರ ನಾಟಕ ಕೀರ್ತಿ | ಎಲ್ಲಿನೋಡಲು ಮರಾಠಿಯರ ನಾಟಕದರ್ಥಿ  
ಎಲ್ಲಿನೋಡಲು ಮರಾಠಿಯರ ನಾಟಕ ನಟರ ಮೂರ್ತಿಗಳ ಸಂಚಾರವು |  
ಎಲ್ಲಿನೋಡಲು ಮರಾಠಿಯರ ನಾಟಕದಾಟ | ಎಲ್ಲಿನೋಡಲು ಮರಾಠಿಯರ ನಾಟಕದೂಟ  
ಎಲ್ಲಿನೋಡಲು ಮರಾಠಿಯರ ನಾಟಕಮಯಂ ತಾನಾಯ್ತು ಕರ್ಣಾಟಕಂ.

ಶಾಂತಕವಿ—‘ನಾಟಕ’—ಪ್ರಭಾತ. ಮಾರ್ಚ್ ೧೯೧೯.

3. ಎಲ್ಲಿ ನೋಡಲು ಕನ್ನಡದ ಭಾಷೆಮೆಟ್ಟಿ ಯದ | ರಲ್ಲಿಲ್ಲ ಮೈದುರಬ್ಬವಿಲ್ಲ ಭಾಷಾಸರಣಿ |  
ಯಿಲ್ಲವೈ ಸ್ವಾರಸ್ಯವಿಲ್ಲ ನಾಟಕವಿಲ್ಲ ನಟನಟಿಗಳಿಲ್ಲವಿನ್ನು ||  
ಇಲ್ಲವವು ಮುಂದಾಗುವಾಶೆ ಕೂಡಾ ಇಲ್ಲ | ಇಲ್ಲವೆಂದೀ ಧಾರವಾಡದ ಸೀಮೆಯಜನಂ |  
ಸೊಲ್ಲಿಸುವ ಕಾಲದಲಿ ಕರ್ಣಾಟ ನಾಟಕಂ ಪುಟ್ಟಿದುದು ಕೃತಪುರದೊಳು ||

— ಅದೇ

basic inspiration for the Marathi theatre and which was 'the most manly of entertainments.'<sup>1</sup>

The first professional troupe of North Karnatak appeared in Gadag ( *Kṛtapura* ) in the year 1877.<sup>2</sup> This troupe was called *Karnāṭaka Nāṭaka Company* and also *Sri Veeranārāyaṇa Prāsādikū Kṛtapura Nāṭaka Mandali*. Inspired by the passionate pleadings of Shāntakavi, some local enthusiasts of Gadag like Umachgi Lacchappa Nāyaka, Gudi Rāghavēndrāchārya, Konnur Jeevu Bālappa and Kunni Immanna put on boards the play *Ushā Harana*<sup>3</sup> written and directed by Shāntakavi himself. This troupe seems to have been the very first to mark the advent of the professional stage in North Karnatak, and its inspirer, Shantakavi richly deserves to be called the *prathama Guru* of Kannada drama.<sup>4</sup>

*Ushāharana* was followed by a series of 'ten and more' plays by

1. ಗಂಡುಗಿ ಗಂಡುಗಾಯನ ಗಂಡುಧ್ವನಿಗಳು |

ಗಂಡುಗುಣತಂ ಗಂಡುಗೇಕೆ ಹಾಕಿ ಲಾಲಿ |

ಗಂಡು ನಿರ್ಣಯ ಮರ್ದಳವಾದ್ಯ ಗಂಡು ಜಾಂಗಟಿ ಪ್ರದಿ ಕಟ್ಟಿಗೆಗಳ ||

ಪೆಂಡೆಗಳ ಬೊಂಬಳ ಪಂಜುಗಳೊಡನೆ ಧ್ವಂಸ |

ಪಂಡನ ಪುರಾಣ ಕಥೆಯಾಟಗಳನಾಡಿ ಬಂಧ |

ಮಂಡಳಿಯ ಮೆಚ್ಚಿಸಿದ ಘಟ್ಟದ ಬುಡದ ಭಾಗಸತರಾದ್ಯ ಗುರು ನಟರಿಗೆ ||

—ಅದೇ

2. It was in 1874, according to Narayanarao Huilgol ( *Rangabhoomi*, Oct., 1925 p. 54 and May, 1928—p. 134 ); but this is improbable, for, Shāntakavi has made it clear that it was started in 1877. ( *Prabhāta*—March 1919 ) This is not contradicted anywhere as far as could be seen. Secondly, there is some inaccuracy with regard to this point in Sri. Huilgol's observations, for, he says that the *Kṛtapura Nāṭaka Mandali* was started by Shāntakavi himself in 1874 ( *Rangabhoomi*—Oct., 1925 p. 54 ) and contradicts himself later, saying that it was started by Umachgi Lacchappa Nayaka and others in the year 1872-73 and that Shāntakavi only joined them later. ( *Rangabhoomi* May, 1928, p. 134 ). Shāntakavi is firm and categorical in his saying that he was responsible for the troupe coming into existence in 1877.

3. Narayanarao Huilgol writes that the first play staged by the Company was *Bāṇāsura* ( Shāntakavi ) followed by *Keechaka Vadha*, *Vatsalā Harana*, *Seetāranya Pravesha* and *Sundopasunda*. ( *Rangabhoomi*—May 1928 ; p 135 ) This is possibly incorrect because Shāntakavi himself clearly says that the first play staged by the troupe was *Ushā Harana*.

( ಅತ್ಯವಸರನ ಮಾಡಿ ಪ್ರಥಮದೊಳುಷಾಹರಣ ನಾಟಕವ ರಚಿಸಿ ಪದ್ಧತಿಯಂತೆ

ನಟನವಂ ಕಲಿಸಿದವು —

( ಶಾಂತಕವಿ — ಪ್ರಭಾತ ಮಾರ್ಚ ೧೯೧೯ )

4. “ ಇದೆ ಮೊದಲಿನದು ನಮ್ಮ ಕನ್ನಡನಾಡಿನೊಳ |

ಗುದಯಿಸಿದ ಕನ್ನಡದ ನಾಟಕದ ಮೇಳವಾ |

ಮದರಿಂದ ಕರ್ಣಾಟ ನಾಟಕ ಪ್ರಥಮ ಗುರುವೆಂದೆಂಬರೆಮುಗಿದಿಗಂ- ”

—ಅದೇ

Shāntakavi.<sup>1</sup> These performances opened the eyes of the people of North Karnatak. People were thrilled when the gods and goddesses on the stage spoke the very language that they themselves spoke. The audience jumped with joy and became lavish in their praise and patronage. They liked the play, the players and the production, and believed that within a night by witnessing a show, they would earn all the pleasures of this world and attain all that is worth in the other.<sup>2</sup> This great triumph of Shāntakavi, was of a much more than a mere personal achievement. He showed the way, and the whole country followed. Within a couple of years Kannada professional troupes sprang up everywhere. There was a rich output of Kannada plays and very soon, the visiting professional-troupes from Maharashtra realised that the people here were no more under their spell. "Because of the conspicuous change in the attitude of the people, Maharashtrian professional troupes bypassed North Karnatak and went to Mysore and Andhra in 1876-77"<sup>3</sup> in search of new audience for their plays.

The Kṛtapura Mandali started touring cities and villages. Under the inspiring guidance of Shāntakavi, it had a mission to fulfil—it had to establish the Kannada stage for good. The company visited important centres of North Karnatak and staged plays at Dharwar, Belgaum, Navalgund, Naragund, Hubli and Saundatti, to the great astonishment and relish of the people. The company could not pay visits to distant places for want of transport facilities.

The troupe had a band of good artists, all well-versed in Kannada and Sanskrit literature. They came to be honoured not merely for their histrionic ability but also for their learning and for their remarkable talent as *Pravachankāras* or interpreters of the classics. The leading artist of the troupe was Gudi Rāghavendrāchārya who played roles of

1. Other plays written by Shantakavi are *Sriyāla Satva Pariksha*, *Sundopasunda Vadha*, *Keechaka Vadha*, *Sudhanva Vadha*, *Seetiranya Pravesha*, *Sakuntalotpatti* and *Chandrāvali Charitre*. These are prose plays with appropriately interspersed songs.

2. ಚಿಲುವ ರೂಪಗಳಿಹವು ಚಿಂದ ಬೇಸಗಳಿಹವು |  
ಲಲಿತ ಭಾಷಣವಿಹುದು ತಿಳಿಗಾನವು ಇಹುದು |  
ಬೆಳದ ಭಕುತರ ಮಹಿಮೆಯಿಹುದು ಹರಿದರರಾಗಾಧ ಲೀಲಾಮಾಯೆಯು ||  
ಭಳಿರೆಯಪರವೆನುಗೆ ಸಾಧಿಸುವದೊಂದಿರುಳ್ |  
ಗಳಿಯದಿವರಾಡುವರೆ ನೋಡುವೆನೆಯೆಂದುಜನ |  
ರುಲಿಗುಮಿದು ಮಜ್ಜೊ ಮಮತೋ ಮೆಜ್ಜೊ ಕನ್ನಡದ ಭಾವೆಯಭಿಮಾನದುಕ್ಕೊ

ಶಾಂತಕವಿ — " ನಾಟಕ "

3. N. K. Huilgol : *Rangabhoomi*—Oct., 1925. p. 54.

Bheema and Ghatotkacha with a brilliance which earned for him a great reputation.

“If the people learnt that Gudi Rāghavendrāchārya was playing Bheema, they would flock the theatre and the evening's collection in those easy days would be Rs. 1,200/-.”<sup>1</sup>

Dambala Hucchāchārya, another talented artist, played the heroine with great success. It is said that sometimes, even during the day, he would dress up like a lady and attend ladies' social functions without being detected.<sup>2</sup> Badāmi Puttāchārya earned a name as the *Vidūṣaka* and Konnur Jeeva Bālappa, a well known musician of the time was the popular *Sūtradhāra*. Behind this band of cultured, learned and enthusiastic artists was Shāntakavi, keeping them in fine fettle with rigorous training schedules. The troupe earned a good amount of money and wide popularity “and made the Marathi troupes hesitate to come into Karnatak.”<sup>3</sup>

#### PRODUCTION:

The Gadag plays were produced on the lines of Yakṣagāna though the performance itself was refined and richly supported by appropriate settings and costumes. As in Yakṣagāna, the Bhāgavata-called *Sootradhāra* was present throughout, evidently in a corner of the stage, to introduce each new character and to sing or speak the narrative. The *sootradhāra* appeared on the stage as the play began, and sang the invocation (*Nāndi*). He was followed by the *Vidūṣaka* who, as in the *Dodḍāṭa*, was dressed up all too oddly with bunches of neem leaves tied around his head, and made the audience laugh with his dances and songs. Then followed *Gaṇapati* and *Shārada*, the presiding deities of learning, to bless the play with success. This marked the end of the dramatic “overture” or *Poorvaranga* which was followed by the regular play. The play invariably ended with burning of camphor, the *Māṅgaḷārati*. The Kṛtapura troupe's performances became known for their literary and histrionic merit. Shāntakavi was the living force behind it, writing plays<sup>4</sup> and training the artists.<sup>5</sup>

1. N. K. Huilgol : *Rangabhoomi*—May, 1928. p. 135.

2. N. K. Huilgol : *ibid.* p. 135.

3. N. K. Huilgol : *ibid.* p. 135

4. Apart from the plays of Shāntakavi, this troupe staged a few plays written by Umaehgi Seenappa, particularly his *Jāmbavati Kalyāṇa*.

5. Shāntakavi was working as a teacher in a Kannada school at Gadag. It is said that his superior officer, sympathising with the Marathi companies which

The Kṛtapura Nāṭaka Mandali functioned for 16 years; but the death of Konnur Jeeva Balappa and Dambal Hucchāchārya, two of its prominent artists, brought about the end of the troupe in 1894-95, and every effort made by Shāntakavi to revive it failed. Without yeilding to despair, he wrote new plays<sup>1</sup> for other professional troupes that had sprung up as a result of the inspiration provided by the Kṛtapura Mandali; he held musical discourses instilling into his audiences a love of their land, and lived for two decades more to see his efforts crowned with success. He made the Kannadiga wake up from his slumber and see the rich inheritance of his language. He died in the early Twenties, but his plays remain shining examples of a successful compromise between the methods of Yakṣagāna and the full-fledged modern stage play. His plays did not achieve anything strikingly new by way of production technique or characterisation, but the story moved fast and with effect.

#### THE FIRST PLAYWRIGHT:

Shāntakavi can rightly be called *The Kannaḍa Nāṭaka Pitāmaha* or Father of the professional Kannada drama. It is true that Churamuri Seshagirirao of Dharwar had translated the *Shākuntala* of Kalidasa into Kannada in 1869, about five years before Shāntakavi wrote his first play, but it was only in 1899 that an enthusiastic troupe of Badami made an attempt to bring it on the stage.<sup>2</sup> Actually, the play in its full length was first staged with all the seriousness it demanded (though in two parts on separate evenings) only in 1905 by the *Bhārata Kalōttējaka Sangeeta Samāja*, the first amateur troupe of North Karnatak; and so, Shāntakavi's plays appeared on the stage much earlier than Churamuri's. Available evidences indicate that Shāntakavi preceded Karibasavappa Shastri of Mysore also, for the latter's *Kannada Shākuntala* was performed in the year 1881 in the month of November,<sup>3</sup> practically six years after the staging of

were jealous of the success of this troupe, transferred Shāntakavi to Hombal. This did not deter the playwright's determination. Shāntakavi made it a point to return to Gadag every evening after the school hours by walking up the distance or riding a horse or even a buffalo in order to rehearse his artists.

1. *Sectā Swayamvara*, *Mayūradhwaja*, *Kalāsura*, *Pratāpa* and other plays were written for Nargund Company. Shāntakavi was later associated with Shirahatti Venkobarao's *Srī Mahālakṣmī Prāsādika Nāṭaka Mandali*.
2. Mudavidu Krishnarao: Preface to Churamuri's *Kannada Shākuntala Nāṭaka* (1934). p. 32
3. C. Ananda Rao: *Mysore Rangabhoomiṃ Itihāsa* (Manuscript).

Shāntakavi's plays in North Karnatak.<sup>1</sup> This indicates that the credit of writing a stage-play in Kannada and performing it for the first time in Karnatak goes to Shāntakavi.

Some writers have held that the dramatic troupe of the village *Halsigi* came into existence earlier than the Kṛtapura Nataka Mandali. The latter is given the second place chronologically.<sup>2</sup> It is also observed that Shri Venkannāchar Agalagatti, popularly known as *Srinivāsa Kavi* wrote plays for the Halsigi troupe.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is indicated that the Halsigi company was the first professional troupe in North Karnatak and that Shrinivasa Kavi was the first modern playwright.<sup>4</sup> The suggestion cannot be accepted for the following reasons:

The time of Shrinivas Kavi's writings as suggested by Mudavidu Krishnarao in his address in 1929 is "about sixty years age" which would not give an accurate date for the playwright. It is entirely on this vague reference of Sri Mudavidu the foregoing inferences are based. Secondly, as early as in 1929, Shāntakavi himself declared in his narrative verse entitled *Nāṭaka* that the very first Kannada *Mela* came into being in Kṛtapura (Gadag) and that he himself came to be called *Karnāṭaka Nāṭaka Prathama Guru*, because it is he that first trained a troupe.<sup>5</sup> His claims are accepted by his contempora-

1. The very translation of *Shūkuntala* by Karibasavappa Shastri cannot be placed earlier than 1880 according to Mudavidu. (Mudavidu's letter to the Editor; *Rangabhoomi*, April, 1930, p. 148) and his conclusion gets some support as obviously, this translation was made at the instance of King Chamarāja Wodeyar who, after witnessing the Marathi and Parsi shows in the year 1878, desired that his court poets should write similar plays in Kannada. The suggestion of Sri. M. G. Nanjundaradhya that Churamuri's translation was influenced by Karibasavappa Shastri (*Kannada Stage Centenary* Volume I, p. 117) cannot be accepted. The very method of translation and the suitability of one to the popular stage and the other to the Court Theatre confirms that neither of them had any influence on the other.
2. Mudavidu Krishnarao: Welcome Speech on the occasion of the first Dramatic Conference at Dharwar, 1929; *Rangabhoomi*, Feb., 1930, pp. 88-102.
3. Sri Mudavidu (Ibid) and R. Y. Dharwadkar: *Kannada Company Nāṭakagalu—Jayanti* 1st Oct., 1950, p. 189.
4. The plays of Srinivas Kavi are *Srimati Parinaya*, *Madālāsa Parinaya*, *Draupadi Vastrāpaharāṇa* and *Bhāsmāsura Akhyāna*.
5. ಇದೆ ಮೊದಲಿನದು ನಮ್ಮ ಕನ್ನಡದ ನಾಡಿನೊಳ  
ಗುದಯಿಸಿದ ಕನ್ನಡದ ನಾಟಕದ ಮೇಳವಾ  
ದುದರಿಂದ ಕರ್ನಾಟ ನಾಟಕ ಪ್ರಥಮ ಗುರುವೆಂದೆಂಬರೆಮುಗಿಂದಿಗೊ

Shāntakavi: *Nāṭaka: Prabhūta* (Dharwar), March, 1919, pp. 1-8

ries.<sup>1</sup> It is said also that Srinivāsakavi was *younger* in age, though he died before Shāntakavi.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Shāntakavi's own words could be given full credence, for he impresses one as a self-less crusader who could hardly snatch an honour that is not rightfully his own. He would not be so proud and happy if he ever had the least doubt about his own unchallenged position. He paid due regard to Churamuri Sheshagirirao as the first playwright in Kannada in a foot-note to his poem *Nātaka*, and he would not have hesitated to accept the Halsigi group as having held the banner of Kannada drama prior to the Kṛtapura Mandali—if it really was so. The Halsigi troupe became well known, no doubt, because of the refined quality and imposing showmanship of its performances but it did not live long. “*Inspired by the Kṛtapura Mandali*”, as Shāntakavi observed in another foot note to his poem, “professional troupes suddenly sprang up in Nargund, Navalgund, Halsigi, Badami, Rabakavi; but they died only too quickly.”<sup>3</sup> The Halsigi troupe must have come into existence in about the year 1878-79. After staging a few plays written by Srinivāsakavi, it appears to have, for a couple of years, stopped functioning. It was revived again by the year 1882—when Mudavidu Krishnarao witnessed its performances at Sirsi. It is possible that the Halsigi group undertook for the first time, a tour in the neighbouring regions like Bellary as mentioned by Sri Mudavidu, and this fact must have contributed to its popularity. In any case, it should be accepted that the Halsigi troupe was a highly talented one, but there is no evidence to show that it was in existence before the Kṛtapura Nātaka Mandali. It is to Shāntakavi, to his great love of the Kannada land and language and to his genius in play-writing, production and organisation, that the Kannada stage of North Karnatak owes its beginning and so, he richly deserves the coveted title *Kannada Nātaka Pitāmaha*, the father of the professional theatre in Karnatak.

1. Takappa Ijari : Kannada Rangabhoomiya Itihāsa : *Rangabhoomi* Dec , 1925 p. 117. and also

“ ಕರ್ಣಾಟಕ ನಾಟಕ ಪಿತಾಮಹರೆಂದೆನಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲು

ಅರ್ಹತೆಯುಳ್ಳ ಶಾಂತಕವಿವರ್ಯರು.....”

ಸಿ. ಪನುಮಂತಗೌಡ ‘ ಪರಿಪಕ್ವತ್ರಿಕೆ ’ ಅಕ್ಟೋಬರ್ ೧೯೨೯. ಪುಟ-೧೭೫.

2. Collected from Sri Betgeri Krishnasarma.

3. ಈ ನಮ್ಮ ಉತ್ತರ ಕರ್ಣಾಟಕದೊಳಗೆ ನರಗುಂದ, ನವಲಗುಂದ, ಹಲಸಗಿ, ಬಾದಾಮಿ, ರಬಕವಿ ಮುಂತಾದ ಕಡೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಕನ್ನಡ ರಂಗಿತ ನಾಟಕಗಳು ಅಷ್ಟುಪೂರ್ತಿ ಹುಟ್ಟಿದವು ಮತ್ತು ಅಡಗಿದವು. —Shāntakavi : *Nātaka : Prabhāta*—March, 1919. p. 8.

### THE KANNADA *Shākuntala* :

It was with regard to the translation of *Shākuntala* that the Marathi stage stole a march over Karnatak. Churamuri Seshagirirao of Belgaum was the first in Karnatak to have translated the *Shākuntala* of Kālidasa into Kannada. He completed the translation in the year 1869-70 and very soon *published* it. The play, however, had to wait for three decades to appear on the stage; but all the verses of the play had already become highly popular by this time, as they were based on popular folk tunes and on well known *rāgas* of Karnatak music. These tunes and the arresting stage methods of Seshagirirao attracted the attention of his friend Anna Saheb Kirloskar of Gurlhosur. Anna Saheb, himself a born Kannadiga,<sup>1</sup> saw in the ideas of Churamuri, revolutionising possibilities for the stage and soon translated *Shākuntala* into Marathi in the year 1878-79<sup>2</sup> on the lines adopted by Churamuri.<sup>3</sup> In October 1880, he produced the play in Poona with a group of musicians under the name *Kirloskar Sangeeta Nāṭaka Mandali*. His *Sangeeta Shākuntala* revolutionised the Marathi stage with several innovations in the stage-methods, like each actor singing his own songs instead of the Bhāgavata doing it.<sup>4</sup> Almost Every dramatic-troupe in Maharashtra immediately took to staging *Shākuntala* and made the play so popular that within a short while the play was re-printed several times,<sup>5</sup> and in addition, earned for Annasaheb Kirloskar the title, *Father of Musical Drama*. This brought about some disappointment in North Karnatak where it was felt that at least some acknowledgement must have been made to Churamuri, for he was in a way responsible for Annasaheb Kirloskar's translation of *Shākuntala*.

### PROFESSIONAL TROUPE :

The ceaseless effort of Shāntakavi and his enthusiastic and talented band of artists shook the people and artists of Gadag out of their sloth and inspired them to revive the professional theatre in North Karnatak. The immediate outcome was heartening, as a number of dramatic troupes sprang up in Dharwar, Ranebennur, Hirekerur, Lakshmeshwar, Hubli, Kaulgi, Navalgund, Naragund, Halsigi, Badami and Rabakavi.

1. Mudavidu Krishnarao : *Address*. p. 12.

2. Narayanarao Huilgol : *Rangabhoomi*. Oct., 1925. p. 55.

3. Mudavidu : *Op. cit.* p. 29.

4. The verses of Bhav's plays and of the Marathi *Shākuntala* were mostly set to the tunes of Kannada *Javadi*, *Pārijāta* and *Dāsarpada*.

5. Mudavidu : *Op. cit.* p. 29.

This however, proved to be a short-lived glory; the professional troupes never really established themselves, but vanished soon after.

#### AT HALSIGI:

Of the many short-lived companies, the professional troupe of Halsigi ( in Belgaum district ) deserves mention. Halsigi had a cultural heritage, of its own, as it was the capital of the Kadamba dynasty in the 10th and 11th centuries, and had remained sensitive to any political or cultural movement. The Halsigi group must have come up about the year 1878-79 as already suggested. The moving spirit behind it was Venkannachar Agalagatti, popularly called *Shrinivāsa Kavi*, who wrote plays like *Shrīmati Parīṇaya*, *Madalasā Parīṇaya*, *Draupadi Vastrāpaharaṇa* and *Bhāsmāsūravādhe*. The reason for the great popularity of the Halsigi group was the exceptional talent of the artists, who were learned in the Sanskrit and Kannada classics. They lived a pious life and never missed their religious observances and proved that an artist of the stage could retain his orthodoxy and piety. While on tour, the artists attracted people by their *Pravachanas*, or musical discourses built around stories from the epics and classics. They considered their tours as a religious and cultural mission and utilised their time for the best advantage of both the villagers and themselves. Theirs was one of the best methods of attracting people to the theatre. On invitation, they toured different important villages and cities from Belgaum to Bellary. After a period of inactivity, the company revived itself in about the year 1882 and started on its rounds once again. During this second phase of its activity it produced two exceptionally talented artists who were renamed *Sandigi* and *Mandigi* who are even now remembered for their histrionic abilities. *Virāṭa Parva* was the most popular play of this troupe.

#### TANTUPURASTHA NĀTAKA MANDALI:

The first professional troupe in North Karnatak that made bold to undertake a tour in different parts of Karnatak, Maharashtra and Āndra was the *Tantupurastha Nāṭaka Mandali* of Dharwar, which came into being early in the Eighties. The troupe had among its members Bhimāchārya Eri, Gopināthrao Joshi, Ramabhāu Halsigi and Dattātreya Rao Dharwad, who were well known for their histrionic abilities. With initial success in the villages and cities of North Karnatak, the troupe equipped itself with good costumes and settings and set out on tour to neighbouring regions for a period of two years with intermittent

periods of rest.<sup>1</sup> The troupe consisted of both Kannada and Marathi artists, learnt the languages of different regions and staged plays in Hindi, Marathi and Telugu. Dr. C. Narayana Rao, writing about the influence of Karnatak on the Telugu stage, recalled the visit of an 'enthusiastic dramatic troupe of Dharwar' to Andhradesha.<sup>2</sup> His observation that the troupe consisted of both Karnatak and Marathi artists suggests that the *talented troupe of Dharwar* was none other than the Tantupurastha Nāṭaka Mandali.

"The troupe made a good impression on Āndhra and influenced the Telugu stage, which began to emulate some of its traits. The theatre of Andhra, therefore owes a good measure of obligation to this troupe."<sup>3</sup>

The troupe returned to Dharwar by 1885, when the first railway lines were laid in North Karnatak. Many of the members of the troupe were tired of an itinerant life and sought employment. Quite a few of them joined the railways. This was a great loss to the North Karnatak Stage.

In the last decade of the 19th century many an important professional troupe, including the one at Gadag led by Shāntakavi, had become defunct, mostly due to internal feuds. By the year 1890, there was not a single professional company sufficiently strong to hold aloft the banner of the Kannada stage. Quite a number of troupes sprang up here and there it is true, but they were too feeble to do anything substantial. These troupes were crowded with enthusiastic illiterates "who learnt the lines by rote and reproduced them like parrots". Drama became a ludicrous affair in the eye of the educated, and soon, the acting profession became unpopular. The effort of educated enthusiasts like Shāntakavi could not restore to the stage the respect it had earlier enjoyed. The last decade of the 19th century witnessed painful convulsions of many a dramatic troupe tossing between life and death.

#### THE HINDU UNION CLUB:

This state of affairs and the new railways offered opportunities to the Marathi troupes to visit Karnatak again. The most prominent of

1. Sri Mudavidu observes that the troupe travelled about for twelve years : (*Rangabhoomi*, Feb., 1930, p. 93). It looks an error for, he himself notices later that the troupe returned by 1885 when some of its members took employment in the first railways of North Karnatak.

2. Dr. C. Narayana Rao : *Kannada Stage Centenary Vol.* pp. 109-114.

3. Ibid p. 111-112.

the many visiting troupes was the famous, *Kirloskar Sangeeta Nataka Mandali* which visited Dharwar in 1893. This troupe, for the first time, acquainted the Kannada audiences with the achievements of the Marathi theatre. Their shows of *Ramarāya Viyōga*, *Shāpa Sambhrama* and *Saubhadra* became popular here, but set the active minds to seriously think about the future of the Kannada stage. *The Hindu Union Club* in Dharwar staged the Marathi drama *Trātika*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, done by Prof. V. B. Kelkar of Poona.

In a way, this effort of the Hindu Union Club was a challenge to the visiting companies all right, for it is said that the performance of the Club was a shade better than the performance of the same play (*Trātika*) by the well known *Shāhunagarawāsi Natak Mandali* which staged "some of the finest plays in prose seen on the Marathi stage" and which had to its credit, a brilliant galaxy of actors including Ganapatrao Joshi and Balavantrao Jog. May be it was with a touch of obvious pride that the talent of the Hindu Union Club was compared with that of the *Shāhunagarawāsi Nataka Mandali*, but the former group proved that it deserved it when it staged in Marathi, *Rānā Bhīmadeva* and *Naraveera Malusare* with brilliant success. Bijapur took up the trend from Dharwar and some enthusiastic graduates like Kaujalgi Shrinivasrao and Mugali Shrinivasrao started staging plays in Marathi, of which *Rānā Bhīmadeva* became most popular.

#### REVIVAL:

It was a case of history repeating itself. Marathi plays became popular again and the people in North Karnatak seemed to ignore the Kannada play. The sensitive Kannadiga was irritated by the diplorable condition of the contemporary Kannada theatre.<sup>1</sup> The stage was now set for a counter-movement. This time, the lead was taken by the *Prāchya*

1. ವಿದ್ವಾನ್ಮಾನ್ಯ ನಾಟಕಗಳು, ಮನೋಹರ ಗಾಯನ, ಭಾವಪೂರ್ಣ ಅಭಿನಯ, ಸ್ಥೂಲಕಾಲ ಪಾತ್ರಾನುರೂಪ, ಉಡುಗೆ ತೊಡುಗೆ, ನೇತ್ರಾನಂದಕರವಾದ ನೇಪಥ್ಯ, ಚಿತ್ತಾಕರ್ಷಕ ನೋಟಗಳು, ಅಚ್ಚುಕಟ್ಟಾದ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ಮೊದಲಾದ ಎಲ್ಲ ವಿಧದ ಸಾಧನ ಸಂಪತ್ತಿಯಿಂದ ಸಜ್ಜಾದ ಗುಣಗಣ ಸಮಾವಿಷ್ಕವಾದ ಮರಾಠಿ ನಾಟಕ ಮಂಡಳಿಗಳ ಮನಮೋಹಕ ನಾಟಕಗಳನ್ನು ನೋಡಿ ಸುಖವುಂಡ ಇತ್ತೆಕಡೆಯ ಜನರಿಗೆ ಅಸಂಸ್ಕೃತ ಆಖ್ಯಾನ, ಅಪಸ್ವರ ಗಾಯನ, ಯದ್ವಾತದ್ದ ಅಭಿನಯ, ಅಸಂಬದ್ಧ ಉಡುಗೆ ತೊಡುಗೆ, ಅಸಹ್ಯವಾದ ನೇಪಥ್ಯ, ಶೂನ್ಯದರ್ಶಕ ನೋಟಗಳು, ಅಸ್ತವ್ಯಸ್ತ ಪರಿಸ್ಥಿತಿ ಇತ್ಯಾದಿ ಅನವಸ್ಥೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಆಗರವಾದ ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕಗಳನ್ನು ನೋಡುವುದೆಂದರೆ ಅಗಾಧ ದುಷ್ಕರ್ಮವೆಂಬಂತೆ ತೋರಿದ್ದರೆ ಅಶ್ಚರ್ಯವಾಗುವ ಕಾರಣವಿಲ್ಲ.

ಮುದವೀಡು : ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ V. ಫೆಬ್ರವರಿ ೧೯೩೦. ಪುಟ. ೯೪.

*Kreeda Samvardhaka Mandali* of Madihal (Dharwar Taluk) which had been staging a Kannada play every year from 1896. The troupe reorganised itself in 1904 and renamed itself *Bharata Kalottējaka Sangeeta Samāja*. The troupe placed before itself the aim of reviving popular interest in great kannada plays which had now been forgotten. It decided to pay more attention to the art of the theatre than to commercial gain. *In this sense it was an amateur group, the first of its kind in North Karnatak.* The first play chosen was Churmari's *Shākuntala* which had been ignored for more than a decade. When the first four acts of the *Kannada Shākuntala* were staged, the troupe received superlative acclaim by the elite of Dharwar, and this encouraged the troupe to take up *Mricchakatika*, rendered into Kannada by Uluveshakavi. Well-known Marathi plays – *Rāmarāya Viyoga* and *Saubhadra*, rendered into Kannada by Mudavidu Krishnarao were also staged with great success. The troupe attracted to the stage, many a cultured and educated person including Deshpande Tirumalarao who belonged to the best known family of classical musicians. It looked as if the stage of North Karnatak stood again on its feet owing to the ceaseless efforts of this talented and determined troupe. Shāntakavi praised it whole-heartedly.<sup>1</sup> The railways intervened again, this time, by shifting its headquarters from Dharwar to Madras, and with the headquarters went many a member and actor of the troupe, leaving it helplessly depleted. All efforts made by enthusiasts like Deshpande Tirumalarao to revive the troupe with new talent only made it linger on feebly for about seven years until the year 1915–16 when it died a sick man's death.

The contribution of the Bharata Kalottējaka Sangeeta Samāja to the stage of North Karnatak is significant from three points of view. It threw a self-respecting challenge to the Marathi theatre, it made an effort to revive the classical element in Kannada drama; and thirdly, it paved the way for the amateur theatre in Karnatak.

1. (ನುಹಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರ ಭಾಷಾಮಯನಾದ) “ಈ ಸ್ಥಿತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ನಾಟಕಗಳನ್ನು ಬರೆದ ಶಾಂತಕವಿಗಳಿಗೆ ೧೯೦೯ ರಲ್ಲಿ ಭರತಕಲೋತ್ತೇಜಕ ಸಂಗೀತ ಸಮಾಜವು ಹೊರಟು, ‘ಸಾಭದ್ರ’, ‘ಶಾಕುಂತಲ’, ‘ಮೃಚ್ಛಕಟಿಕಾ’ ದಿ ನಾಟಕಾದಿಗಳನ್ನು ಅಡಿ ಹೆಸರು ಪಡೆಯುವದನ್ನು ಕಂಡು, ಕೇಳಿ ಹೊರೆ ಇಳಿದಂತೆ ಹಗುರಾಗಿ ಹಿಗ್ಗಿನಿಂದ “ಕರ್ನಾಟ ನಾಟ್ಯರಂಗದ ಭೂಮಿ ಬೀಳುಬಿದ್ದಿತ್ತು—“ನಾಟಕ ನಟನ ಕಲೆಯ ಸುಸ್ಥಿರಗೊಳಿಸಿ ಕರ್ನಾಟ ರಂಗಸ್ಥಳದ ದುಃಸ್ಥಿತಿಯ ಕಳೆದಿ ನೀನಸಮ ಸಾಹಸಿಕರ್ತಾ” ಎಂದು ಅದನ್ನು ಅಭಿನಂದಿಸಿದರು.”

ದ. ರಾ. ಬೇಂದ್ರೆ—ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಸಂಶೋಧನ. ಪುಟ ೧೭೫.

## IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:

The end of the 19th century marks also the closing of a significant chapter in the story of the theatre of North Karnatak, for, it ends the age of challenge and inaugurates the age of real professional entertainment. In the new age we notice an honest effort to provide real entertainment, bringing better methods of play-production, a good return for the money's worth. From the sentimental plane of the former period, the professional stage of North Karnatak moved on to the practical or rather commercial plane. The new era produced some of the best troupes and artists, and also a number of stage-worthy plays. In the beginning, themes of most of the plays were mythological. Many of them were translations of Marathi plays, but they were suitably adapted for the Kannada stage. Acting became refined and production more slick. The number of troupes also increased, and it looked as though the future held great things in store for the Kannada Stage.

## THE SHIRAHATTI TROUPE:

One of the first impressive professional troupes that appeared was the *Sri Mahālxmi Prāsadita Nātaka Mandali* of Venkobaraο Halgerikar, popularly known as Shirahatti Venkobaraο. Venkobaraο, the leader or rather, the *proprietor* of the Mandali, came originally from Koppal. He started the troupe in 1903, when a boy of 18. He had established it on a sound footing by the year 1906. Prominent among his first actors were Kollurayyaswami, Govindacharya and Vamanaraο Master. His first play *Padmāvati Parinaya*, based on the popular Pauranic story was much appreciated. In 1906, the company staged *Shākuntala* ( of Churamuri ), *Kālidāsa*, and *Yuvati Vijaya*. His success here spurred Venkobaraο to move out with the troupe to other parts of Karnatak. In the year 1910, the company visited Mysore and staged plays in the Town Hall. The company's success secured for it royal audience and patronage. Venkobaraο, who played Bhattanāyaka and Vamanaraο Master who played Kālidasa in the play *Kālidāsa Charite* were honoured by the Maharaja. The Maharaja helped the company to tour Maharashtra, Karnatak and Āndhra, staging plays like *Vivēkōdaya*, *Kālidāsa Charite*, *Pralhāda Charitre*, *Krishna Leela* and *Rāmāyana*. When in 1916, the troupe visited Mysore again, it was invited by the court to stage *Shani Prabhāva* and *Krishna Leela*. In later years, the troupe earned a very good name by staging *Rāmānjaneya Yuddha* written by Torangal Rajeraο and *Indirā*, a translation by Mamdapur Gururao of the well known Marathi

stage play of the same name.

Shirahatti Venkobarao was himself a gifted actor. He often surpassed with his brilliant 'prose-acting', even the musical achievements of Vamanarao.<sup>1</sup> His asset was a good team of artists. The role of Nārada played by Shirahatti, the humour of Lakshmanapuri, the endless musical elaboration of Asundi and the *ālāp* of Hombal Vāsudevaraya never failed to evoke the enthusiastic admiration of the audience.<sup>2</sup>

Shirahatti believed in showmanship and spent a good deal of money on costumes and settings. He had once witnessed at Mangalore, a Tamil play performed by the *Brihadambāl Company* of Madras, and had been convinced that appropriate settings and costumes are fundamental to the creation of dramatic illusion. He immediately spent Rs. 6,000/- and obtained specially devised new settings for the play *Daśāvātāra*. He did create a perfect theatrical illusion, both for Hiraṇyakaśipu on the stage and for the people in the auditorium, when he made God Narasimha come out breaking open not only the main pillar, but also nine others, and made all the ten Narasimhas ultimately merge together into one Super God.<sup>3</sup> Garud Sadashivarao, a noted contemporary actor-playwright observed that Shirahatti's was perhaps the best equipped company in North Karnatak, especially during the years 1915 and 1925. Including the tent, Shirahatti's company had forty-seven cartloads of stage property while Garud's own had eleven cartloads of them.<sup>4</sup>

Venkobarao was not only a talented artist, but was also a very able "proprietor" with considerable powers of organisation. Quite often, he had to use 'professional tricks' to meet unexpected situations and he played them with shrewdness. His application and intelligence were happily favoured with good luck, and all through, he carefully worked his way to fame and fortune. His company thrived for

1. There was, it seems, a friendly rivalry between Venkobarao and Vamanarao in eliciting the applause of the audience. Vamanarao would easily get an ovation after elaborating a song with his golden voice. Shirahatti devised a number of tricks to make an impression on his first audience, and one such was to wear a rather tight stiff-collar (made to order) with press-buttons. He would, at a tense moment, stiffen his neck and make the collar fly out into the auditorium. The ovation this act received was always greater than the one that Vamanarao could get with his singing.

2. K. S. Karanth : *Hucchumanassina Hattu Mukhagalu*—p. 41.

3. Collected from Pandit C. Y. Kavali who was for some years the practising manager of the Shirahatti Company. (MSS)

4. Collected from Sri Garud Sadashivarao (MSS)

33 years, continually adapting itself to the changing tastes of its audiences and ultimately came to an end in 1936. Two years later, Sri Venkobarao passed away. He had rendered his share of service to the stage of North Karnatak.

#### KONNUR'S CONTRIBUTION:

A savant of the Kannada Stage in North Karnatak who is remembered to this day for his services to the theatre was Śivamūrthiswāmi Kanbargimath whose one great ambition in life was to build up a troupe that could stand comparison with the most colourful ones of Maharastra. He and his troupe came from Bailhongal in Belgaum district. *Konnurkar Kādasiddhēswara Sangeeta Nātaka Mandali* was the name of the troupe which Konnurkar—as Kanbargimath was called—lead. The troupe had an impressive career from the time of its inception in 1901 till its disappearance about twenty years later.

Śivamūrthiswāmi was the first to introduce women-artists on the stage, a move that was at the time a revolutionary innovation, a heroic step that no man had taken before. But he was alive to the tastes of his audiences and desired to make drama look 'real' with women performing the feminine roles. He also brought modern amenities to the stage. One of his triumphs was the use of 'revolving settings' on the stage. He put these to use with great results in the play *Śani Prabhāva*, a masterpiece of his company. In a split second he changed the gorgeous court-scene into a thick dark forest with the help of the revolving settings and created the illusion of a miracle performed by the magic horse which brought King Vikrama from his Court to the distant dark forest. The lights would go off for a split second and before they came on again, a seemingly impossible change would occur on the stage making the rustic audience disbelieve their eyes.

Śivamūrthiswami introduced electric lights for the first time on the stage, making use of a dynamo. To match all these innovations he equipped the troupe with gorgeous costumes and imposing settings. His services to the kannada stage became doubly significant because he began working for it at a time when it was looked down upon as a crude and cheap resort. The credit of equipping the Kannada stage with many a modern device and establishing it as an equal to the Marathi stage, goes to Śivamūrthiswāmi,

"If ever the Kannada theatre is to be grateful to any single individual who gave freely of his time and money for the betterment of the Kannada stage, it is to Kanbargimath." <sup>1</sup>

1. Shri Mudavidu; Op. cit. p. 33.

## MOUTH-PIECE OF PATRIOTISM:

The successful examples of Venkobarao and Sivamūrtiswāmi made many an ambitious youth to take to the stage. The doors were now thrown open to women also. Soon the theatre attracted many young enthusiasts. Youths dreamt of becoming actors, and actors cherished the ambition of becoming proprietors of stylish Companies to earn 'easy money and fame.' The stage, for once, looked a very attractive and highly profitable profession. The result was that a rich crop of professional troupes sprang up again after 1905. The period following the partition of Bengal in 1905 brought forth an intense feeling of nationalism all over the country: and it also saw the upsurge of a new provincial patriotism. Karnatak did not prove an exception to this. Considered attempts were made to make the stage a medium for the expression of this feeling in the land. New historical plays based on the lives of Kannada heroes were written and the Kannada stage began to reflect the new enthusiasm of the country and people. With regard to the working of professional troupes it was the old story repeating itself once again. Many a troupe that held out a great promise initially, died a premature death, but a few of them stood firmly and assumed the stature of proud institutions of indigenous art, culture and patriotic feeling

*Vishva-Gunādarśa Mandali:*

One of the actors of the day who carved out a brilliant career for himself as a proprietor was Vāmanarao Master, who had become well-known for his musical ability and restrained acting even while he was serving as an actor with Śīrahatti Venkobarao. Vāmanrao started his own professional troupe *Vishvagunādarśa Nāṭaka Mandali* in 1913. Vāmanarao had a flair for poetry. He had the skill of a playwright too, but he never risked any experiment until the troupe had found its feet. The first plays of the troupe had already held the stage with Venkobarao's company. Mythological plays like *Padmāvatī*, *Kālidasa*, *Krishna Leela* and *Indira* were taken up again and produced with success. Once established, Vāmanrao himself translated popular Marathi plays and staged them. The prominent among his successful translations for the Kannada stage were *Vidya Sādhana* (adaptation of Khadiikar's famous play *Vidya Harana*), *Sandēha Sāmraṇya*, (*Samsaya Kallol* of Deval), *Pārvaṭi Satva Parīkṣhe* (from the Marathi original *Mahānanda*), *Sant Sakhūbai*, *Pundalīka*, *Bājirao Peshve* and *Veera Abhimanyu*. The striking characteristics of his plays were the homely

language he used and the arresting tunes of the songs, drawn freely from those of Maharashtra. Vāmanrao aimed at giving rich entertainment to his audiences and never stinted himself in this regard. He, like Venkobarao, had an eye for spotting talent and soon he gathered round him a number of gifted artists, the most prominent of whom were Gangubai Guledgudd, Mallikarjun Mansur, Gururao Deshpande, Basavaraj Mansur, Keshavabhatta Modi and Ranebennur Mallappa who were all known for their musical and histrionic accomplishments. With this band of faithful artists, he toured Karnatak staging his own plays. In 1922, when he was in Mysore, he was honoured both by the people and the Maharaja Krisnarajendra Wodeyar IV. With his organisational abilities, training and talent, Vāmanrao led his troupe from success to success. He shrewdly wound it up in 1934 when he took ill. He passed away in 1935.

The life and career of this troupe was intimately related to the life and career of Vāmanrao himself.<sup>1</sup> He gave the troupe everything it needed to become steady and popular. *Viśvaguṇādarśa Nāṭaka Mandali* set new standards for the Kannada stage with regard to stage-music and easy flowing dialogues. The troupe's plays did not exhibit the pomp and colour of the ones of Śivamūrthiswāmi, nor the high ambition of the plays of Venkobarao; but they always assured a dignified presentation of an agreeable theme in intimate prose and alluring music.

#### HALGERI COMPANY:

Halgeri, a small village near Ranebennur, attracted the attention of every ambitious artist and playwright with its experiments in the dramatic field. The stage was to be a co-operative adventure and in the year 1912, the villagers invited applications for shares and established a dramatic troupe called the *Sri Hūlasiddheśwara Prāsādita Sangeeta Nāṭaka Sabhā*. The management of the company was initially entrusted to Linganagowda Patil, but the troupe really came to prominence about five years later when Dodda Jettappa took charge of it. He was not an actor to start with. Some say that he set foot on the stage in 1918 at the village Byādgī. The early failures of the

1. "ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯವಾಗಿ ನಾಟಕದ ಕಂಪನಿಗಳ ಜರಿತ್ರೆಯನ್ನು ತೆಗೆದುಕೊಂಡರೆ, ಅವುಗಳ ಸಮಾಸ ಸಂಪರ್ಕ ಹೇಯವೆಂಬ ಪ್ರತೀತಿ ಬಂದಿದೆ. ಬರಿಯ ಪ್ರತೀತಿಯಲ್ಲ, ಸತ್ಯ-ಕಥೆಯೂ ಹಾಗೇ. ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯರಾಯರು ಈ ಅಪವಾದದಿಂದ ದೂರನಾಗಿದ್ದರು. ಸ್ವಭಾವತಃ ಶಿಲವಂತರೂ ಸುಸಂಸ್ಕೃತರೂ ಆದ ಅವರು ತಮ್ಮ ನಟರೂ ಹಾಗೆಯೇ ಇರಬೇಕೆಂದು ಬಯಸಿದ್ದರು."

—ಅ. ನ. ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾಯ—ಕರ್ಣಾಟಕ ಕಲಾವಿದರು ೧. ಪುಟ ೯೦

company had run it down into debts and the creditors used to come immediately after the box office was opened in the evening. Dodda Jettappa thought it wise to be on the stage in make-up in order to avoid these unwelcome visitors. He therefore just put on some paint on his face, wore any attire that was unwanted by others and appeared on the stage in unimportant roles. Immediately after the close of the play, he would get away from the green room straight to the railway station and would come again to Byāḍgi only on the evening of the next show.<sup>1</sup> This 'forced necessity' became his habit, and soon, Jettappa discovered that he was an actor. Gradually, he learnt to play Sumanta in the play *Pāduka*, Ashoka in *Viṣama Vivāha* and later, even a complex role like Vikrānta in *Rākṣasi Mahatvākāṅkṣā*. His reputation as an actor of outstanding ability spread over the whole of North Karnatak.<sup>2</sup> His fame earned money for the troupe and enabled it to travel all over the entire Kannada land for 12 years. Later, his brother, K. C. Chikka Jettappa, who had already become known for his comic roles took up the reins of the troupe and managed it with equal success.

If Venkobara's troupe came to be recognised for its rich settings and lustrous production, and Vamanarao's for homely dialogue and alluring music, the Halageri Troupe made a great name for its penetrating humour. The Jettappas considered that the purpose of drama was to give a hearty laugh to the audiences.<sup>3</sup> They were not very much mistaken, to judge by results; soon, the Halageri company had become very well known indeed. Its plays were essentially 'social' in theme. Ones that provided scope for humour were particularly selected. In the line of successes came *College girl*, *B. A.*, *Pathāni Pāsha*, *Black Market* and *Stree*. It was sometimes a case of catering to low tastes, the jokes were now and then 'ugly' or 'went too far', but on no

1. Collected from Pandit C. Y. Kavali.

2. "ಹಲಗೇರಿಯವರು ಅದ್ಭುತದ್ದು ನಾಟಕಗಳು ಪಾತ್ರಸೃಷ್ಟಿಯಲ್ಲಾಗಲೀ ಸನ್ನಿವೇಶ ಜೋಡಣೆಯಲ್ಲಾಗಲೀ ಉನ್ನತಮಟ್ಟಕ್ಕೆರಿದಿರಬಹುದು . . . . ಜನರು ಆ ನಾಟಕಗಳಿಗೆ ಮಾರುವುದೇ ಎಂದು ಕೈ. ದೊಡ್ಡ ಜಟ್ಟಿಪ್ಪನವರ ಅಭಿನಯವನ್ನೂ ಹೇಡಿಗಳನ್ನೂ ವಿರರನ್ನೂ ಗಿಸುವ ವಿರರವಾಣಿಯನ್ನೂ ಕೇಳುವುದಕ್ಕಾಗಿ."

ಎಚ್. ದೇವೀರಪ್ಪ-ಕನ್ನಡದಲ್ಲಿ ನಾಟಕ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ.

3. "ಈ ಮಂಡಲಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ನಾವು ನೋಡಬೇಕಾದುದು ಹೃದಯಸ್ಪರ್ಶಿಯಾದ ಬಹುಮಟ್ಟಿಗೆ ಹಾಸ್ಯಮಯವಾದ ಸಂಭಾಷಣೆ ಮತ್ತು ಹಿತ ಮಿತ ಅಭಿನಯ . . . . ನಾಟಕಕಾರನು ಕಟಕಿಯಿಂದ, ಅಣಕದಿಂದ, ವ್ಯಂಗ್ಯದಿಂದ, ಹಾಸ್ಯದಿಂದ ನಮ್ಮ ಬೆರಳನ್ನೇ ನಮ್ಮ ಕಣ್ಣಿಗಿಟ್ಟು, ಕಾಂತಾ ಸಮ್ಮಿತಿ 'ಯಿಂದ ನಮ್ಮ ಮನದ ಮಲವನ್ನು ತೊಳೆಯುತ್ತಾನೆ."

ಅದೇ.

ತತಮಾನೋತ್ಸವ ಸಂಚಿಕೆ-೫೫

evening was the gallery empty.<sup>1</sup> The troupe earned money and fame and was eagerly welcomed in cities like Bangalore and Mangalore. It is said that the troupe shifted the emphasis in drama from the hero to the jester. Ever since the visit of this troupe to Mangalore, it is said, a habit was created among the people there, whenever a new professional group appeared, to enquire who was playing the role of the jester.

Humour was not the whole play though it was quite a considerable part of it. The troupe staged a few serious and significant plays also like *Hemaraddi Mallamma*, *Pāduka*, *Chitrāṅgaḍu* and *Tippu Sultān*. Though the presentation was rather crude, it is said that it was a calculated crudeness, for, both Jettappas paid great attention to rehearsals and preparation before the play was produced. Sri Śivarāma Kāranth who was the practising manager of the Halageri Company for some months, speaks of some of the ideal qualities of the leader who kept the troupe under control and in good humour.<sup>2</sup>

The Halageri Company's contribution to the Karnatak stage was *humour* which was the secret of its own success. It was a success well merited, though not without its drawbacks. All said and done, the troupe had found the secret of drawing a full house every evening. Many a professional troupe tried to follow in the foot-steps of the Halageri company, but soon found that the Halageri Company had something more than mere flippant humour which they could not capture. It had considerable acting talent, an eye for the right kind of play and an unquenchable thirst for experiment and adventure. Their performances did become subjects of controversy; nevertheless, they served a purpose, showed a way for the ambitious and experimenting producer and more than all, they surely lived in the memory of their audiences.

#### A NEW TONE:

In the year 1916, Garud Sadāśivarao of Gadag started a 'company' and called it *Sri Dattātreyā Sangeeta Nāṭaka Mandali*. It is this troupe that brought to the Kannada stage for the first time, the gift of real *abhinaya*. The story of this troupe is interwoven with the personal life of its leader.

1. K. S. Karanth quotes the jester (*Nakali*) using even foul language on the stage with a rustic bluntness that would still draw a laugh; Karanth—*Hucchumanassina Hattumukhagalu* pp. 130-131.

2. K. S. Karanth, *Ibid*.

A high standard of acting and a missionary zeal are the two significant aspects of Garud's life and these are richly reflected in the plays staged by the Dattatreya Company. When yet a young boy, Garud is said to have witnessed the Kannada play *Harischandra* staged by an amateur association at Kalburgi in the year 1894. He was filled with joy but his Marathi friends jeered at the crudeness of the Kannada performance. This kindled a fire in the little heart of Garud and he determined to dedicate himself to the stage and produce plays which would be better than the Marathi ones. In order to train himself, he took part in Marathi plays on the occasions of Gaṇeśōtsava and Śivāji Jayanthi. At eighteen, he wrote out a musical play *Mārkaṇḍeya* in Kannada and brought it on the stage. The play is said to have been liked even by his Marathi friends. For about twelve years since his initial success, Garud struggled in Kalburgi, Bijapur and Dharwar and the villages near about, trying to train artists and build up a sound professional troupe to stage his own plays. His experience had confirmed his conviction that the bane of our stage was either poor or excessive acting. He made a study of stage-acting as a science, and took to training the artists of the Koppal, Hombal and Konnur professional troupes. Finally, with the financial assistance given by the friendly Śivamūrthiswāmi Kanbargimath, he started his own troupe, rehearsed his own plays and set out to try his luck.

The Dattātraya Mandali soon earned a reputation for the literary merit of its plays and its well-trained actors. The troupe did not have any imposing settings or costumes during the first ten years of its life, for, Garud desired to prove that a professional troupe could thrive gloriously on the merit of its themes and good acting. By the year 1934, however, the company had been able to equip itself remarkably well, spending what, in those days, must have been a fabulous amount,<sup>1</sup> and had become highly popular. Garud staged his plays in every important village and town of Karnatak and Maharastra. His troupe continued to be the training ground for many a young artist. Apart from Garud himself, Neelkant Gadgoli, Seetaram and Pavanje attracted great crowds. The troupe was frequently invited to pay visits to Poona, Sangli, Jamkhandi and Kolhapur. It set a new standard for the Maharastrian stage with an emphasis on *abhinaya*.

1. The equipment included six silver pots, each weighing about 20 tolas, and 60 tolas of gold in ornaments and decoration of the throne. An amount of about Rs. 6,000, was spent for providing special costumes and settings for the play *Shakti Mahime*. (Collected from Sri Garud Sadashiv-rao, MSS.)

Garud seems to have written fifty-four full length stage-plays drawing his themes from mythology, history and contemporary society. Many of his plays like *Ecchamanāyaka*, *Pādukā Pattābhiṣēka*, *Viṣama Vivāha*, *Śakti Vilāsa*, *Kabirdās* and *Sharana Basava* earned a good name for the Dattatrēya Mandali. The troupe came to be recognized for its 'team spirit', 'moral character' and a high order of acting. Garud was a hard task-master, a meticulous but patient trainer and a man who imposed on himself and every other actor of the troupe a strict "moral" code. Initially, he refused to have women in his troupe, but had to introduce one, just to respect the resolution passed under his own presidentship, by the Second Drama Conference that met in Bangalore under the auspices of the Kannada Sāhitya Parishat,

"So I made a thorough search and selected one of the ugliest of women but with some histrionic talent — called Narasāsāni. The play *Śakti Vilāsa*, I wrote primarily for her sake".<sup>1</sup>

The Dattatrēya Nāṭaka Mandali set a standard in stage acting. It was the first troupe to re-kindle the love of their land in the hearts of kannadigas, with its powerful plays like *Ecchamanāyaka* and *Sharana Basava*.<sup>2</sup> The troupe proved that the greatest asset of a professional troupe was its faithful actor who had the patience to learn and practise the art of drama and who had a sincere desire to serve it. The troupe heralded a message that the stage was a temple of art both for the artist and the audience and that it should be so treated for the country's own benefit.

Garud suffered a terrible blow in the death of his last child, a girl of six, who was a 'prodigy in acting', and this proved fatal to the progress of the company. The company virtually came to a close in 1944. Now an old veteran of 75, Garud still hears the call of his country and nurses the ambition of reviving his troupe.<sup>3</sup> Five years ago<sup>4</sup>, he presided over the Drama Conference of the Bellary District. He declared that the theatre of Karnatak, representing as it did, the culture and art of the region, had a tremendous task to fulfil in free India. He considered the steps that should be taken in this regard.<sup>5</sup> Just recently<sup>6</sup> he collected the remnants of his broken troupe, came to

1. Collected from Sri Garud Sadashivarao ( Mss ).

2. This Sharana Basava, is not the great Basaveshwara but another saint.

3. Since, Sri Garud passed away on 27th August, 1954.

4. 5th December, 1948.

5. Garud Sadashivarao — Presidential Address in the Drama Conference, *Kalā-Bellary* 1951. pp. 29-39.

6. October 1953.

Dharwar and put on board three shows of *Ugrakalyāna*, a play dealing with the problem of inter-communal marriage. He himself played a role in it. The performances truly gave a glimpse of the original grandeur of production and magnificence of acting of Dattātreya Sangeeta Nāṭaka Mandali.

#### OTHER TROUPES:

Under the influence of one or the other of the representative professional troupes already mentioned, a number of dramatic companies appeared between the years 1920 and 1945. Even as they were born, early death was writ large on their faces: yet some of them became well known owing to the brilliance of one or two gifted artists or because of a forceful playwright who worked for the troupe. Particular mention may be made of troupes run by eminent artists like K. Sitaram Shāstri of Sirsi (*Jayakarnātak Nāṭaka Mandali*), Siddharāmappa Handignur (*Vishva Ranjana Nāṭaka Company*), Gangubai Guledgud (*Shri Kṛṣṇa Nāṭaka Company*), Muddu Veerāchārya (*Shri Rāmasevā Nāṭya Samsthe*) and Basavaraj Mansur and Gohar Karnataki (*Vani Vilāsa Company*). Each one of them held some promise but its very strength was its weakness, for it depended for its success on the talent of an individual, not on team-work. Thus the sobriquet 'one pole tent troupe' which was used to describe these troupes in those days, applied to them both literally and metaphorically. Yet, the stage music of the *Koppal Sangeeta Nāṭak Mandali*, the showmanship of *Abbigeri Nāṭaka Mandali*, the smart production of plays by *Vijayalakṣmi Nāṭaka Sabhā* of *Āladahalli* are remembered to this day. Some professional troupes run entirely by women also made a lasting impression on their audiences.<sup>1</sup> Each one of them, evidently, had real promise and would have served the theatre better and longer if it had received a little more encouragement. But the advent of motion pictures was already beginning to have its effect on the theatre. Audiences began to reject the stage in preference to the cinema. But even to-day, in the villages, particularly on the occasion of a fair or festival, professional troupes spring up, and lead an attenuated and spasmodic existence. There are still scores of dramatic troupes in North Karnatak. The best known among them are the *Kalā Vaibhava Nāṭya Sangha* (Belgaum) of Balappa

1. Perhaps the best known of professional troupes run by women was the *Laxmeshwara Stree Nāṭaka Mandali*, led by Bacchāsani, a well known musician of North Karnatak.

Enigi,<sup>1</sup> *Shāradā Sangeeta Nātak Mandali* (Gokak) of Basavaraj Hosmani, *Kumārēshwara Sangeeta Nātika Mandali* (Kamatagi) of Gangādhara Shāstri Chittaragi,<sup>2</sup> *Lalita Kalōddhāra Mandali* of Kandgal Hanumantarao, *Kumārēshwara Kripāposhita Nātika Sangha* of Puttayya Gavai, *Vasantakalā Nāṭya Sangha* of Arjuna Nakod and *Samāj Vikās Nāṭya Sangha* (Dodwad) of Siddhayyaswāmi Karlawadi. These seem to be shadows from a lost age, but they have held the stage all the same, particularly, the troupes of Enigi Balappa and Gangadhara Shastri.

#### CAREER AND EXPERIMENT:

The career of the professional stage of North Karnatak stretches over a period of eighty years with a clear cut division into two periods. The first period of about thirty years, up to the end of the 19th century, was a period of its consolidation. Though a regular professional stage did not find its moorings in the last century, its attraction and potentialities produced a faith in the enthusiastic individuals who came forward to chisel out a real career for it in the period that followed.

The second stage of its career, starting from the beginning of the present century, was a period of experiment and consolidation. The artist seemed to have more time and greater freedom during this period. Each worked on a different aspect of the stage; Shirahatti Venkobarao and Shivamurthiswami on showmanship, Vamanarao on stage-music, Halageri Jettappas on humour, and Garud, on acting and writing for the stage. Yet, each came to be convinced that after all, drama needed every one of these elements in happy proportion to be a homogeneous and symmetrical structure. The popularity of the professional troupes of this period and the happy memories they have left behind is sufficient testimony to their sincere effort and achievement.

#### THE PROFESSIONAL THEATRE OF MYSORE.

Conditions obtaining in the old Mysore were different. The challenge of the Marathi stage was absent there. The professional

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1. In the year 1957, the troupe had a long and fruitful season in Hubli. Their play *Jayajyoti Basaveshwara*; based on the life of the great Saint—poet of Karnatak had a continuous run for about 250 nights. Shri Enigi himself played the role of Basaveshwara and made the performance memorable.
  2. The Chittargi troupe also had a triumphant season in Hubli in the latter part of the year 1957. Their social play *Jeevana Yātre* attracted large crowds for over two hundred continuous nights.

stage of old Mysore was gradually evolved out of the court theatre on one hand and the folk theatre on the other.

#### THE BEGINNING :

The Mysore palace had inherited a keen interest in drama from the court of Vijayanagar and kept up a tradition of extending patronage to it. "As early as in 1826, the palace had its own dramatic troupe,"<sup>1</sup> but this was obviously the *Bidārada Dashāvatara Mēla*, the Yaksagāna party of the palace, maintained from 1812 or even earlier. It staged the traditional Yaksagāna or Bhāgavatara Āta and was not a 'dramatic troupe' in the modern sense of the term. It was a happy story of court patronage extended to a folk mode. Any tangible result with regard to the professional stage in Mysore was achieved after the year 1870 when the Marathi and Parsi troupes visited Mysore.

The Sangli Company (originally of Vishnupant Bhawe) under the leadership of Mahadevabhat paid a visit to Mysore in 1876-77 and staged mythological plays at the palace in the presence of the Mahārāja, Chāmarājendra Wodeyar. Learning of the success of the Sanglikar troupe, the *Victoria Parsi Company* paid a visit to Mysore the next year and staged *Indra Sabhā* and *Gulebkavali*, making them memorable with dazzling costumes, settings and curtains.<sup>2</sup> These performances, with lady artists taking part on the stage, stunned the people who were used to witnessing only the *Daśāvatāra* plays. More than anything, the wonder was the curtains that rolled up and down 'automatically'. People never understood the language of the plays but still, came in large numbers to see the miracle performed by the curtain.<sup>3</sup> These visiting troupes opened the eyes of the local people to the possibilities of establishing their own stage, utilising the histrionic talent and material resources of the region.

1. M. G. Nanjundaradhya : *Kannada Stage Centenary* Vol. I, p. 144.

2. The Parsis had four different sets of curtains with matching side-wings—the front curtain *Ankada Pharade*, the 'forest curtain', the 'court curtain' and the 'street curtain'. Three or four feet in front of the *Ankada Pharade*, kerosene lamps were placed in a row on the stage. For imposing scenes like the King's Court (*Durbar*) the Parsis used burning sticks called *Mātāpu* that emitted coloured light.

3. The Parsi settings and scenery were obviously more odd than the Marathi ones which were comparatively simple. The Parsi curtain which provided the background for an intimate mythological theme like *Indra Sabhā* had the 'Windsor Castle', or the inner apartment of a French hotel painted on it. In the play, the king got a throne all right, but members of the 'Durbar' sat on fashionable folding chairs.

*The Palace Company :*

In the year 1880, Shri Chāmarājendra Wodeyar instructed the students of the Royal School ( attached to the palace ) to try theatrical experiments, and so, they staged the play *Prahlāda*. Though in Marathi, the play was very much relished as it was entirely different from the usual *Daśavatārada āṭa*. Later, the encouraged students staged a play in English entitled *Finished Apartments*. C. Rangacharlu, the then Dewan of Mysore, who witnessed the performances by the students of the Royal School, saw the advantages of developing a local stage. With the permission of the Mahārāja, he instructed the court poets—Basavappa Śāstri, Sosale Ayyā Śāstri, Jayarāyachārya and others, each to write out a play in Kannada. An early and fruitful result was the Kannada rendering of *Śākuntala* by Basavappa Śāstri. The Dewan, himself a scholar in Sanskrit was very happy at the translation and soon the play was rehearsed with artists drawn from the Royal school.<sup>1</sup> It was carefully rehearsed under the supervision of the Head-master B. Mallappa ( checking up the pronunciation of words and also acting ), *Asthāna Vidwān* Sadāśivarao and Subbanna ( training the artists in Music ) and R. Raghunatharao ( general supervision of production ). The troupe was called *Śākuntala Karnātak Nātak Sabhā* as it was the first troupe to stage the Kannada version of the immortal play of Kālidāsa.<sup>2</sup> After rigorous rehearsals, the play was first staged in the Palace in November, 1881, and the talented troupe consisting of Lakshmipati Sastri ( *Śākuntala* ), M. D. Subbanna ( *Duṣyanta* ), Giribhattara Tammayya ( *Kaṇva* ) and Devaraj Urs ( *Vidūṣaka* ) was richly honoured for its triumphant success. The show was put up for the public in the specially erected stage at Kalyāni Maidān in December 1881. People for the first time saw the marvel of a Kannada play in such dazzling settings and costume. The miracle

1. It is said that when one day the Dewan came to the Palace for royal audience, he met on the ground-floor, a group of young and educated officials connected with the Palace indulging in leisurely informal talking. The Dewan was greeted by them and as he went up, he thought they were imitating him at his back. He was right, for when he took a look at them from the *Chandra Shālu*, they were imitating the method and manner of his gesture and talking. The little group got a rude shock when it suddenly realised that the Dewan had observed its indulgence. The Dewan later received the young men and said with a smile as to how happy he was at their histrionic talent. Some of them were immediately taken up as members of the Palace Dramatic Company.

( C. Ananda Rao : *Rangabhoomi*—Sept. 1925. p. 44 ).

2. Also *Śākuntala* was the first Kannada play taken up by the troupe.

was performed by the rolling-up curtain in the same way as it did on the Parsi stage. This great success inspired the troupe to move to Bangalore to stage public shows early in 1882. 'The Palace Company' earned a great reputation, and as a token of gratitude to the King who was responsible to bring it into being, the troupe re-named itself as *Sri Chāmarājendra Karnātak Nātaka Sabha* in 1882.

On the instructions of the Mahārāja who desired that well known English plays also should be translated into Kannada, enthusiasts like C. Subba Rao and A. Ananda Rao translated Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*. These plays, when staged by the *Palace Company*—as the troupe was popularly known—changed the public taste considerably, and improved stage production from the standards of *Daśavātārada āṭa*. The troupe gradually equipped itself with new plays—all translated from Sanskrit, like *Vikramorvasīya*, *Chanda Kauśika*, both translated by Sosale Ayya Śāstri, *Ratnāvali*, *Uttararāma Charitre* and *Mālati Mādhava* translated by Basavappa Śāstri and *Mṛcchakatika* translated by Subba Śāstri.

The main roles like Shurasena in *Shurasena Charitre*, Rāmavarma in *Rāmavarma-Līlāvati* and Aśwathāma in *Veṇṣaimhāra* were played by Certain Ramarao, and roles like Dushyanta, Udayana and Manmatha by M. D. Subbanna while the talented Lakshmiṇī Śāstri played the leading female roles.<sup>1</sup>

In the year 1884, Bidārada Krishnappa, a prominent court musician was put in charge of rehearsals,<sup>2</sup> and H. Lingaraja Urs, the Darbar Bhakshi, in charge of general administration. Shri Krishnappa collected the cream of the talent available in Mysore, and in 1889, secured the services of Mandyam Rāṅgāchārya<sup>3</sup> who was already well known as

1. Rājā Ravivarma, the well-known painter and critic who had extensively toured India is said to have paid a compliment to Lakshmiṇī Sastri—as the most gifted actor in India. A. V. Varadachar had accepted him as his ideal in the art of acting. (C. Ananda Rao—MSS)

2. Bidārada Krishnappa, with his great accomplishments in music and acting, was a prominent member of the *Daśavātārada Mela* of the Palace from 1865 and thus, had a rich experience to fill this post.

M. Venkata Krishnayya, *Kala*, III 1, July, 1931.

3. Mandyam Rāṅgāchārya was one of those who were inspired by the Marathi shows in 1878. He collected his talented friends and started a troupe called *Rajadhāni Nātaka Mandali* and successfully staged in 1881, the Kannada version of the play *Banāsurōpākhyāna* of the Sangli Company. He earned a reputation as one of the most talented actors that Mysore ever produced. Under his leadership the troupe had a "friendly rivalry" with the Palace Company. (Contd.)

a great actor, *Puttari Śāstri* who later excelled himself in humorous roles and also *Janjūti Seshagirirao*, a well trained musician having considerable histrionic ability. This talented group, guided by Bidārada Krishnappa, marked the inauguration of the golden era of the professional stage in Mysore. It set out early in 1890 on a tour to distant parts of Karnatak including Dharwar, Belgaum and Bellary and roused a new consciousness there, towards the Kannada Drama.<sup>1</sup> Much later, when Sardar M. Gopalraj Urs took charge of the management, the troupe undertook for the first time, an extensive tour in Andhra and Tamilnad. The Palace troupe had an established high standard of acting and showmanship and continued its taste for classical plays and dignified portrayal. With these qualities it survived with success, the keen competition of several dramatic troupes that had sprung up both in the capital and in the round-about cities.<sup>2</sup>

In the year 1917 the palace troupe was disbanded and all the fabulous theatrical property was distributed among the members who were permitted to choose their own career. Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV permitted also the revival of the old *Śakuntala Karnātaka Nātaka Sabhā*, independent of the Palace.

Thus it is the *royal patronage* that initiated the era of professional stage in Mysore city. The fact that the Palace Company staged public shows on tickets confirms its commercial nature and secondly, actors

† “ಬಸವಪ್ಪ ಶಾಸ್ತ್ರಿಗಳಂಥ ಕವಿಗಳೂ ನಾಟ್ಯವಿದ್ಯಾನ್ವಿತರುಳ್ಳವರನ್ನು ಪಡೆದ ಮಂಡ್ಯದ ರಂಗಾಚಾರ್ಯರಂತಹ ನಟನಾಕೃತ್ಯಯುಳ್ಳ ನಟಶ್ರೇಷ್ಠರೂ ಆಗಿ ಇಡೀ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿ ಯಾರೂ ಇದ್ದಿಲ್ಲವೆಂದೇ ಹೇಳಬಹುದು.”

ಸಿ. ಹನುಮಂತಗೌಡ : ಪರಿಷತ್ಪತ್ರಿಕೆ : ಅಕ್ಟೋಬರ್ ೧೯೧೯ ಪುಟ : ೧೭೭.

Shri M. A. Gopalaswami Iyengar has written a brief biography of Mandyam Rangacharya; The author, in fact, attributes all the greatness of the Mysore stage to the genius of two actors; Mandyam Rangacharya and A. V. Varadacharya. M. A. Gopalaswami Iyengar; *Mysore Rangabhoomi*—1926.

1. While in Bellary, on seeing the play *Sūrasena Charitre* (Othello), a British Army Officer (a Lt. Col.) hailed the play as a model translation and paid a tribute in public to Rama Rao's talent (Certain Ramarao who played the hero) that he eminently fitted to be counted among the greatest of British actors and that it was doubtful if even the greatest of British actors could compare well with Rama Rao in the role of *Othello*. The next day, Sri Rama Rao, with the entire troupe was taken round in procession by the citizens of Bellary and was given valuable gifts. (C. Ananda Rao, MSS).
2. There came up a rival group in the Palace itself when the independent minded prince Nanjarāja Bahadur of Madana Vilasa started his own dramatic troupe and staged *Tulā Bhāra*, *Rāmāyana* and *Nala Charite*. K. Raghuvarah and Veerappa played the leading male and female roles. The troupe staged its plays in Bangalore in 1884-85 with some success.

(C. Ananda Rao, MSS).

like Mandyam Rangāchārya, N. Subbanna and B. Rāchappa were employed as actors with a full-time profession on the stage. Finally, the palace troupe led the way and inspired scores of dramatic groups after the year 1882, and thus helped in establishing the professional theatre of Mysore on a sound foundation. The friendly rivalry among different troupes resulted in a better selection of plays and improved methods of presentation. As in North Karnatak, the initial credit of inspiring an indigenous theatre in Mysore also goes to the Marathi and Parsi touring companies, but, it is the palace that nursed the stage in Mysore with great care and saw to its firm establishment and natural development. King Chāmaraja Wodeyar took personal interest in his actors and their comfort. While on tour with the king, and often in the palace, the actors enjoyed the same food and comforts as the King himself.<sup>1</sup> When the King went out of the State he invariably took his actors with him and made them witness stage plays produced by other companies in different languages. He sent some of the leading artists including Certain Rama Rao on an observation tour to the Balliwalla Company in Bombay to study the stage-craft.<sup>2</sup> The King ordered costumes, settings and all the equipment for different plays, built a small stage in the palace itself at *Karikāl Totti* and even allowed the troupe to have its rehearsals in *Chandra Śāle*, a spacious outer apartment in the Palace. The troupe had the great benefits of the best cooperation of the well known pundits and musicians of the palace. It was privileged to be under the direct supervision of the Durbar Bhakshi, the Chief Officer of the palace affairs. The Dewan and the Mahārāja were keenly interested in its progress. Such an atmosphere would naturally keep the troupe fully alert, and move it towards achieving things that were impossible for others.

#### CONTRIBUTION OF THE PALACE COMPANY:

The greatest of royal gifts to the theatre of Karnatak was a series of

1. C K. Venkataramiah. *Kan. Centenary Vol. II.* p. 67.

2. ಹಲವು ತಜ್ಞರನ್ನು ಬೊಂಬಾಯಿಗೆ ಕಳಿಸಿ ಅಲ್ಲಿನ ಸೂತನ ವೀತಿಯ ವಾಸ್ತುಶಿಲ್ಪ, ಸರದಿ ಮತ್ತು ಬಾಕಟ್ಟುಗಳ ಚಿತ್ರಣ ಮತ್ತು ಜೋಡಣೆ, ರಂಗಮಂಟಪದ ದೀಪಾಲಂಕಾರ, ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿ ಬೆಂಕಿ, ಮಳೆ, ಮುಗಿಲು, ಸರೋವರ ಇವೇ ಮುಂತಾದ ದೃಶ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಸ್ವಾಭಾವಿಕವಾಗಿ ಪ್ರದರ್ಶಿಸುವ ವೀತಿಯನ್ನೂ, ರಂಗ ಪರಿಕರಣಗಳು, ವೇಷ ಭೂಷಣಗಳು ನೇಪಥ್ಯಗೃಹದ ಅಲಂಕಾರ, ವಿಧಾನ ಮೊದಲಾದುವನ್ನೂ ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿ ಪರಿಶೀಲಿಸಿಕೊಂಡು ಬರಲು ಆಪ್ತನಾದರು. ಅದರಂತೆ ಅವರು ಪರಿಶೀಲಿಸಿಕೊಂಡು ಬಂದಮೇಲೆ ಅವರ ಸಲಹೆಯಂತೆ ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯ ಎಲ್ಲ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಗಳನ್ನೂ ಅನುಗೊಳಿಸಲು ಹೇರಳವಾಗಿ ಧನಸಹಾಯ ಮಾಡಿದರು.

ಎನ್. ಎಸ್. ವೀರಪ್ಪ—ಕನ್ನಡ ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯ ಇತಿಹಾಸ—ಕತಮಾನ ಸಂಚಿಕೆ ೧. ಪುಟ-೨೫

Kannada plays starting with *Śākuntala*. The year 1880 marked the age of translation in Mysore and from then, at the royal command, learned pundits of the Court set themselves at the task of rendering into Kannada, well known Sanskrit and English plays. Many a Sanskrit scholar who was not initially connected with the palace like Bellāve Narahari Śāstri, Tirumala Śrīnivāsa Iyengar, Panyam Sundara Śāstri and N. Ananthanārāyaṇa Śāstri, took the trend and contributed to the treasure of Kannada dramatic literature.

The theatre was then firmly established in Mysore essentially by the interest and encouragement given to it by the Mahārāja Sri Chamarājendra Wodeyar. Even after the dissolution of the 'Palace Company' that did 'monumental service' to the king and the country<sup>1</sup>, the kindly disposition of the Court continued towards the theatrical art. The palace extended material support to different professional troupes wherever they came from, and therefore, it was always looked up to as an unfailing patron of the theatre.

The dissolution of the Palace Company which rendered 'a monumental service to the king and country,' was a hard hit to the theatrical art of Mysore, and it stunted the growth of its dramatic literature. Disbanded artists joined together under the leadership of N. Subbanna, a veteran actor of the Palace Company and revived the *Śākuntala Karnāṭaka Nāṭaka Sabhā*, late in 1917. Old plays were again picked up, rehearsed by the re-shuffled troupe and were staged with success in Bangalore and Bellary. The troupe returned to Mysore in 1918 and went defunct owing to disagreement among its members. The frustrated Subbanna and B. Rachappa 'retired' from the stage, but within a year, in 1919, they were harnessed again by their admiring friends who started a new troupe under the title *Sri Chāmundēśwari Karnāṭaka Nāṭaka Sabhā*.

#### PROFESSIONAL RIVALS:

Early in the eighties, inspired by the performances of Marathi and Parsi companies on the one hand, and by the success of the Palace Company on the other, several dramatic troupes sprang up in Mysore.

1. ಈ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯು ತಾನಿಟ್ಟುಕೊಂಡ ತನ್ನ ಅಶ್ರಯದಾತನ ಹೆಸರಿಗೆ ಹೂವು ತಂದಿತ್ತಲ್ಲದೆ ಹುಲ್ಲು ತಾರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ಕನ್ನಡಿಗರ ರಸಜೀವನವನ್ನು ಪ್ರತಿಬಿಂಬಿಸಿತು. ನಾಟಕರೂಪದಲ್ಲಿ ಕನ್ನಡ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಯು ಅಂಧ, ತಮಿಳು, ಮಹಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರ ನಾಡುಗಳ ಮೇಲೆ ದಾಳಿಯಿಟ್ಟು ಸರ್ವರಿಗೂ ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶಕವಾಯಿತು. ದಕ್ಷಿಣ ಭಾರತಕ್ಕೆ ಅಧುನಿಕ ನಾಟಕ ಪ್ರಯೋಗ ಕುಶಲತೆಯನ್ನು ಕಲಿಸಿಕೊಟ್ಟ ಕೀರ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಗಳಿಸಿತು.

—ಶತಮಾನೋತ್ಸವ ಸಂಚಿಕೆ : I ಪುಟ ೫೫-೫೬.

Mandyam Rangāchār who was later acclaimed a veteran artist had already started the *Rājadhāni Nāṭaka Mandali* in 1881. Before joining the Palace, Certain Rama Rao had a troupe of his own. S. S. Setlur and N. T. Gopala Iyengar had started a group of professional artists at Bangalore in 1883. There was already a dramatic troupe in Bangalore staging impressive plays and this was most probably of Bullappa, a wealthy local merchant. These troupes seem to have flourished with good initial success, but not many of them seem to have lived long.

#### THE GUBBI COMPANY:

There was but one exception in *Gubbi Channabasavēśhwara Kṛpā Poṣita Nāṭaka Sangha* which came into being in the same transitional period. The troupe has flourished these years with considerable success. The *Sangha* was established in 1884 by Gubbi Chendanna, Abdul Aziz Saheb and Sahukar Neelakanthappa, who represented incidentally, the Jaina, Muslim and Veerashaiva communities of the village Gubbi in Tumkur district. The company was named after Sri Chennabasavēśwara, the presiding deity of Gubbi and met its initial expenses with subscription raised from the public. The troupe, consisting of the young and enthusiastic artists of the village adapted as its first play for the stage—*Kumāra Rāmāna Kathe*—a well known *Yakṣagāna* Prabandha of the time and changed it to suit the stage; but the traditional *Bhāgavata*, the chorus ( *Himmela* and *Mummela* ) and all other accessories of *Yakṣagāna* were availed of. It was co-incidental, however, that on the day of the first performance of *Kumāra Rāma*, the Mahārāja of Mysore, Sri Chāmarājendra Wodeyar, patron of the 'Palace Company' happened to be in the village Gubbi. The patron volunteered to witness the performance. He was happy to see the show and greatly encouraged the young troupe.<sup>1</sup>

Accidental though, the royal presence gave a fillip and an unusual publicity to the troupe. It set out to Bangalore, staged the same play early in the year 1886 and earned a good name.

After witnessing the more impressive performances of Bullappa's troupe at Bangalore, the proprietors of the Gubbi Company made immediate changes and got a new play *Chorakathe* written by Veerappa

#### 1. ಮಹಾರಾಜರು ಈ ರೀತಿ ನುಡಿದರೆಂದು ತಿಳಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ :

“ ನಾಟಕವು ಬಹಳ ನಾಗರಿಕತೆಯಿಂದ ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿ ಅಭಿನಯಿಸಲ್ಪಟ್ಟಿತು. ಸಬರ್ದಿಲ್ಲರೂ ಉತ್ಸಾಹಶಾಲಿಗಳಾದ ತರುಣರೂ ಜಿತುರರೂ ಆದುದರಿಂದ ಈ ಗ್ರಾಮದಲ್ಲಿ ನಾಟಕ ಕಲೆಯು ವಿಶೇಷವಾಗಿ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಹೊಂದುವ ಸೂಚನೆಗಳು ಕಾಣುತ್ತವೆ. ನಮಗೆ ಬಹಳ ಸಂತೋಷವಾಯಿತು. ”

—ಕತಮಾನೇಶ್ವರ ಸಂಚಿಕೆ ೧. ಪುಟ ೬೪

Śāstri, rehearsed it and after returning to the native village, staged it on an improvised platform with good settings and self-rolling curtains. The troupe soon equipped itself with new plays on different themes like *Pāṇḍava Vijaya*, *Jaganmohan Charitre*, *Harischandra*, *Indra Sabha*, *Dharmapāla Charitre* and *Satyavarma Charitre*, mostly drawn from the mythologies. Separate farces like *Mitai Sawkar* were introduced in the play to provide humour.

The present proprietor of the troupe—G. H. Veeranna, while a boy of 6 years of age, joined the troupe in 1896 and gradually became a master in the stage craft. In 1917 he virtually became the proprietor of the entire management and from that day to this, he has led the troupe from success to success.

The biography of the Gubbi company indicates that it had an impressive past owing to the ceaseless efforts, foresight and ability of Veeranna. With his inimitable capacity to spot the talent, he brought playwrights like Bellāve Narahari Śāstri, Bhīmāraju and B. Puttaswāmiah to serve the stage. He built up a galaxy of artists of commendable skill and ability and made them dedicate themselves to the cause of the Kannada stage. He made all efforts and spent a good amount of money to make the troupe by far *the best* in South India. He could well be proud of making his troupe the ambassador of the theatrical art of Karnatak in other provinces, and particularly, in the Telugu and Tamil areas. Above all, it is to the credit of Veeranna to have given a status to the theatrical art in the Kannada land itself.

Gubbi's is the longest and, perhaps, the most colourful of careers of professional troupes in Karnatak. As early as in 1923, the troupe set out to Madras and staged plays to the great relish of people there. The great success in Madras brought royal patronage to the troupe in Mysore. In 1924, the troupe built its own play-house in Bangalore. In 1925, for the first time, a Children's Theatre was tried out in the *Bāla Kalāvārdhini Nāṭaka Sangha*, which became quite a popular institution with its child-artists. This troupe of young artists toured all over Karnatak on professional lines. In 1926, Veeranna accepted the leadership of a professional troupe at Gadag. At this time, it is said that the Gubbi concern had a big train of about 250 persons including the artists and their families. With an undaunted zeal, new plays were taken up and rehearsed separately by the three wings of the great concern which toured in different specified regions. The main branch of the troupe under the leadership of Veeranna himself made an extensive tour of South India, including Salem, Madras and Coim-

batore. On returning to Bangalore, another play-house was built with modern amenities and was opened by the then Dewan of Mysore, Sir Mirza M. Ismail in 1930. The troupe went over again to Adoni and Raichur, picked up the popular Marathi play *Shiva Chhatrapati*, got it translated and adapted into Kannada as *Swāmi Nīṣṭhe*, and staged it with great success. Imposing settings, scenery and costumes on the one hand, and impressive acting of a talented band of artists which included G. Nagesh Rao, M. V. Subbayya Naidu, Gurumūrtappa, U. K. Vyāsarao and Sundaramma brought continued success to the company. During the years 1932-34, the troupe visited Udipi and Mangalore in South Canara and also Trichy, Ettiyapuram, Kumbhakonam and other important centres in South India. The Golden Jubilee of the Troupe was celebrated in 1934 under the presidentship of the then Dewan, Sir Mirza M. Ismail. To fit to the occasion and to hit at a land mark, Veeranna got the play *Kurukṣetra* written by B. Puttaswāmiah and brought it on the stage with settings, scenes and equipment specially made at a cost of about thirty thousand rupees.<sup>1</sup> The play hit the high water-mark with its literary merit, acting ability and grandeur of production. The production of *Kurukṣetra* was a challenge to the screen which was slowly but surely setting in "to uproot the professional stage." The troupe staged forty continuous shows of *Kurukṣetra* in Bangalore and set out by a special train on an extensive tour of the South again, covering Warangal, Bezawada, Kakinada, Vijayanagaram, Nellur and other centres, staging plays in Telugu and Tamil. The troupe received great honours in most of the places it visited. It was during this tour that Veeranna was publicly honoured in Vijayanagaram with the title *Karnātak Āndhra Nāṭaka Sārvabhauma*, a rare honour to the theatrical art of Karnatak. Veeranna was a bold adventurer but his adventures were also favoured by good luck. For once, the film houses of the South found a great competitor in Veeranna who had diverted the people from the film-houses to the play-house.<sup>2</sup>

On returning to Mysore, the troupe staged plays in the royal presence and was honoured with rich gifts including an elephant cub. The year 1938 saw the height of Veeranna's success. Elephants, horses and moving chariots took part in *Kurukṣetra* and clever filmic

1. Bellāve Narahari Śāstri : *Kannada Stage Centenary Vol. I*, p. 47.

2. When the grand shows of Veeranna were on the stage in the South, "Many film shows were cancelled and the organisers wrote and wired to the distributors asking them not to send good films owing to negligible public response to the films because of Gubbi's *Kurukṣetra*."

A. N. Krishna Rao : *Karnāṭakada Kalāridaru-I*, p. 120.

devices manipulated by projectors brought about a fantastic touch to miracles performed in the play. The Gubbi Company had become an established art-institution with its fabulous paraphernalia, a band of over a hundred talented artists, scores of merited plays and with perhaps an unsurpassed pomp in showmanship. At this stage, Gubbi's was perhaps the most colourful and the best equipped professional troupe in South India.

The success had evidently brought a sense of stagnation in the ambitious Veeranna. He was convinced of his supremacy in the world of the South Indian theatre and now in 1940, desired to make a debut on the screen. Once taken, the decision was pursued with prompt action; but this deviation brought a hard hit to the Kannada stage, and it should be said that the film did not take him to that lofty position which the stage had honoured him with.

Though he virtually deviated in favour of films, Veeranna did not wind up his well established dramatic concern. The management was handed over to M. R. Channappa and A. C. Mahadevaswami who maintained the good name and honour of the concern with able administration. In 1944 the troupe arrived in Mysore and drew packed houses for a hundred and twenty five continuous shows of *Shri Krishna-leela* and the centenary celebration of the play was performed on a grand scale. The year 1945 saw the troupe again in Mysore, and this time, seventeen plays were staged at the palace. In 1946, the well equipped play-house that was built in Bangalore at a great cost was opened by Dr. T. C. M. Rayan and was named *Gubbi Channa Basavēshwara Nātak Shāle*. The troupe got up new plays like *Uṣā Swayamvara* and toured the Kannada country once again, and the year 1948 saw the grand celebration of the centenary of the Kannada stage and the Diamond Jubilee of the Gubbi company. The Centenary Celebration, inaugurated by the Mahārāja of Mysore, attracted playwrights, actors and producers from all over Karnatak. With its splendour and pomp, the celebration marked the crowning climax to the colourful career of the Gubbi troupe.

The splendid celebration was the first of its kind perhaps in South India, conducted in such a magnificent measure. It was in a way a great attempt to collect, consolidate and rebuild the structure of the professional stage of Karnatak. It was a grand example no doubt, but it seemed to be almost the last glow of the dying light because Veeranna had become essentially film-minded and ceased to take any notable interest in his dramatic troupe which continued to receive, of

course, his moral and material support. As a result of his own deviation towards making films, many of his good artists including Honnappa Bhagavatar, M. V. S. Naidu, B. Jayamma, Raghavendra Rao and Vasudevrao Girimaji took to films and were lost for the stage. Some of the old veterans were dead, but still the troupe went on and on, staging new plays. The troupe paid recent visits to North Karnatak staging impressive social plays like *Sāhukār*, *Aḍḍadāri* and *Kālachakra*. Recently, the troupe triumphed with the play *Daśāyatāra*, perhaps the most spectacular of plays staged in Karnatak.

The colourful career of the Gubbi company from 1884 with *Kumāra Rāmana Kathe*, a typical play of the folk stage, to 1954 with a social play *Sāhukār*, replete with fresh humour, suggests a few points of observation that may provide clues for its success and impression. The Gubbi Company seems to owe its success to its remarkable capacity to adapt itself to the changing times and tastes; yet putting in every effort to maintain a good standard of literary merit and dignity in production. It staged as many as about forty different plays based on mythological, historical and also social themes.<sup>1</sup> Apart from discovering and getting men of letters to write out plays,<sup>2</sup> a few popular plays were got translated from other languages, mostly from the Marathi language.<sup>3</sup> While on tour in the South, the troupe staged its plays mostly in Telugu or in Tamil and gained great popularity. The success and progress of the company owes itself to the genius and leadership of Veeranna. He invested most of his returns for the improvement of the stage itself on the one hand, and on the other, always tried his very best to keep his artists above want.<sup>4</sup> He believed in creating a

1. Some of the very popular *mythological* plays of the Gubbi Company, staged before 1900, were *Pāndava Vijaya*, *Satyā Harishchandra*, *Indrasabha*, *Dharmapāla Charitre*, *Satyacarma Charitre*, and (after 1900)—*Prabhāmañi Vijaya*, *Vasanthamitṛe Vijaya*, *Prahlāda Charitre*, *Subhadra Parinaya*, (after 1915)—*Sri Krishna Leela*, *Kamsavadha*, *Rukmini Swayamvara*, *Jalandhara*, *Mārkandeya*, *Sāvitrī*, *Kurukṣetra*, *Uśāsaswayamvara* and *Daśāyatāra*. Some of the popular *historical* plays were *Kārnatak Sāmrajya*, *Swāmi Nisthe*, *Mahātma Kāvīr*, *Sādhu Tukārām* and *Akka Mahādevī*; some of the popular *social* plays were *Chalti Dunia*, *Surā Mahime*, *Sāhukār*, *Aḍḍadāri* and *Kālachakra*.
2. Like Ballav Naraharashastri, Shivalinga Swami of Gadag, Kola Shantashah, Kavi Keshaviah and B. Puttaswamiiah.
3. The important ones are *Surāmahime* (Ekach 1 yāla), *Rāja Bhakti* (Rākshasi Mahatvākāṅksha), *Kārnatak Sāmrajya* (Rupa Dundubhi) and *Swāmi Nisthe* (Chatrapati Shivaji).
4. The highest that was paid by the Gubbi troupe at the times of proprietor Chandanna was rupees fifteen (excluding expenses of maintenance) which

(contd.)

'colossal' impression on his audiences and so, never hesitated in spending money on fabulous scenery, settings, costumes and stage devices.<sup>1</sup> He was correct in his conviction that the best method of keeping the troupe popular and prosperous was to keep it always on its wheels, touring from city to city and province to province. His great success in Tamilnad, Andhra and all over Karnatak established the saying that art has no barrier of language. It goes to the credit of the Gubbi Company to have contributed in a large measure to establish the Karnatak stage on a firm footing in the Kannada land itself and to have heralded its reputation in South India.

#### CONTEMPORARY TROUPES:

It was during the last two decades of the 19th century, the professional stage of Mysore built up its foundation mainly on account of scores of professional troupes that sprang up in important cities, particularly in Mysore and Bangalore. *The Palace Company*, was started in 1881, *The Metropolitan Theatrical Company* also in the same year, *Bullappa's troupe* in about 1881 (Bangalore), *Rasika Manollāsini Nataka Sabha* of Peri Shama Iyengar and the famed *Gollarapete Nataka Company* in 1884, *Srikantēshwara Nataka Sabha* of M. L. Srikantegowda in about 1894, *the Bangalore Union* in 1898 and scores of others came into being in the last decade of the 19th century. And many of them lived across into the first quarter of the 20th century. Among them all, a troupe that lived a glittering life and made an ineffaceable impression on Karnatak was the *Ratnāvali Theatrical Company* of A. V. Varadachar, "the uncrowned king of the theatre of Mysore".

#### VARADACHAR COMES ON THE SCENE:

The foundation of the *Ratnāvali Theatrical Company* is to be seen in the *Metropolitan Theatrical Company*, started in Mysore in 1882 in 'friendly rivalry' with the Palace company. It was started by Myndyam Rangachar 'the first actor of Mysore' with a group of lawyers and officials, but soon his troupe came to be dissolved 'after a very short career of unexampled success and popularity', as Rangachar himself was coaxed to join the Palace Company. Gauri Narasimhayya, who used to play female roles, collected the remnants of the material resources and talents of the troupe to revive it in about the

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steadily rose up to an amount of Rs. 350/- p.m. paid by Veeranna to an actor like G. Nagesharao.

1. The best examples are *Kurukṣetra* and *Dasāvātāra*

year 1886 under a different name, *Sri Saraswati Vilāsa Nāṭaka Sabhā*.<sup>1</sup>

“It was into this venture that Varadachar was first drawn and discovered himself. The rest was only a case of I came, I saw, I conquered. From the year 1889, practically, the dramatic career of Varadachar had begun and for nearly 36 years he was the uncrowned king of the Kannada stage.”<sup>2</sup>

The dramatic troupe set out in 1890, led by Gauri Narasimhayya on an extensive tour of prominent cities in Mysore and the Bellary district. The tour quickly proved to be a great success. The main reason for its success was its high standard of acting and its attractive stage music. In 1890, Varadachar appeared in the Kannada stage, but soon, just as he was finding his true greatness, the company got disrupted at Mysore owing to differences among its members. Varadachar gave up the stage and joined the office of the British Resident in Bangalore as a clerk. An attempt to start *The Bangalore Union* with Varadachar as its leader failed. When Varadachar lost his wife and the only son at Bangalore, he returned to Mysore, a broken man. He was persuaded to revive the old *Saraswativilāsa Nāṭaka Company* of Gauri Narasimhayya. Being unable to resist the forceful persuasion of his admiring friends who desired to make him the sole proprietor and stage director of the concern, Varadachar at last consented, and the company started on its great career in December, 1904 “with a borrowed capital of Rs. 200”. The troupe was renamed *The Ratnāvali Theatrical Company*.

It was the genius of Varadachar that carried the troupe from success to success for about 20 years from this time. Within six years, about 20 plays were staged and some of them, like *Shākuntala*, *Nirupama*, *Manmatha Vijaya*, *Ratnāvali*, and *Visnuleele* made a tremendous impact on the minds of the audiences of those days. Varadachar played leading roles in all these plays and earned a covetable reputation for the troupe. In 1910, when Varadachar

1. M. A. Gopalaswami Iyengar observed that the original name was *Sri Saraswati Vilāsa Ratnāvali Nāṭaka Sabhā* (A. V. Varadāchār—*a sketch of his life and career* 1926, p. 6). But it is improbable, for, the term *Ratnāvali* seems to have been first considered in 1904 by Varadachar himself, because the Kannada version of the play *Ratnāvali*, when first staged, seems to have brought him fame and financial profit. Then he seems to have declared

“ನನ್ನ ಹೆಸರನ್ನು ಕೊಡಿದುದು ಈ ರತ್ನಾವಳಿ. ಅದಾದರಿಂದ ರತ್ನಾವಳಿಯ ಹೆಸರನ್ನೇ ನನ್ನ ಸಭೆಗೆ ಇಡುತ್ತೇನೆ.”

(C. Ananda Rao, *Rangathoomi*, Sept. 1925, p. 46)

2. V. Bhaskaran: *Theatre* (Bangalore) March, 1931, p. 32.

witnessed at Mysore, the impressive performances of the visiting troupe of Govinda Swami Naikar of Madras, his eyes were opened to the theatrical possibilities of mythological themes. He got Rājakavi Srinivasa Iyengar to write the play *Pralhada* for him. The play earned a great name and good money for Varadachar. The same play was staged in Bangalore on twenty six successive evenings. It drew great crowds to the specially erected tent-theatre which accommodated about 1,500 persons. The troupe staged in the palace, five different plays including *Prahlāda*, in the royal presence and was richly rewarded. In 1912, the troupe set out on an extensive tour of South India, to visit Erode, Coimbatore, Karaikudi, Selam, Kumbhakonam, Mangalore, Udipi, Kundapur, Tirthahalli and Bellary. In the year 1913, Bangalore gave a public reception to the troupe and the next year, under the chairmanship of the Diwan Sardar Kantaraja Urs, the public of Mysore honoured Varadachar with the title *Gifted Actor* and showered rich presents on him. The latter part of 1914 saw the troupe again at Udipi at the invitation of the 'Aṣṭa Muth'. In 1917-18, it toured again in the South. It was publicly honoured at Trichy, Kumbhakonam, Madura and Mangalore, as the great cultural ambassador of Karnatak. It was in Trichy that Dr. Annie Besant presided over a well attended public meeting and honoured Varadachar with the title *Nātak Śīromaṇi*, the one title which he proudly flaunted till the end of his days. By 1922, Varadachar was the best known actor in South India, and his troupe, the most successful; but he was tired and in addition, was getting old ( 53 years of age ). Being unable to bear the entire burden of looking after a group of about fifty artists and their families, he consented to amalgamate his troupe with the *Śārada Theatrical Company*, handing over to this company the whole responsibility of management. Early in 1923, the amalgamated troupe toured again in the South for three months and received rich and deserved honours. Soon after its return, however, it closed down owing to new differences and conflicts inside itself. This made Varadachar feel disappointed and almost frustrated. During the latter part of 1923, he made one more effort to bring his old colleagues together again and revive the *Ratnāvali Theatrical Company*. The troupe strenuously endeavoured to put on the stage, three full length mythological plays like *Viṣṇuleela*, *Rāmāyaṇā*, and *Mahābhārata*. When compared with its previous masterpieces like *Śākuntala*, *Nirupama* and *Prahlād*, these full length shows proved to be sorry attempts at dramatising the epics. Still, the troupe toured in the then Mysore State and in 1925, the public

of Bangalore honoured Varadachar with a precious necklace as a token of appreciation of his services to the Kannada stage. A year later, Varadachar died; and with him ended the glorious story of the troupe.

Varadachar's troupe provided rich entertainment both to the learned and the lay. Its asset was its gifted artists like Krishnamoorthi Rao, Bodharao<sup>1</sup>, R. Nagendra Rao, Mari Rao, Raja Iyengar and K. Sectaramarao who provided a solid foundation for the grand super-structure built by the genius of Varadachar. He made some outstanding contributions to the theatre of Mysore. *Stage-music* was one of them. Varadachar's was a notable diversion from the old methods of stage-music. He set a new style which came to be followed for decades after his death. The classical Kannada metres—*Kanda* and *Vṛtta*, were rescued from their narrow obscure settings, were set in rāgās of Karnatak music and were vitalised with a new power and beauty. But, Varadāchār saw to it that music was only an aid in the task of evoking a sentiment.<sup>2</sup> The *sound pit* was introduced by him in order to establish a better contact between the singer on the stage and the instrumental accompanists who hitherto had remained in the side-wings. Varadāchār popularised the leg-harmonium because of the volume of its sound and its utility in providing musical effects,<sup>3</sup> and every other professional troupe took up the harmonium thence after. The *Rannavali Theatrical Company* earned a name for its slickness of production. In order to make his plays attractive, Varadachar introduced dances as interludes or as organic parts of the play in the court-scenes.<sup>4</sup> Better methods of make-up, rationalisation of costumes, a dignified interpretation of characters and a better exploitation of the 'light and shadow' effects (as in *Harischandra* in the 'burial ground' scene), made his plays the finest of those days.

Costumes were made to look more natural. Great sages like

1. "Mr. Bodharao is the most alluring and witching heroine-actor. He is the witching consort of Mr. Varadachar's reign and Mr. Krishnamoorthi is a great comic-genius and is unrivalled as Vidusaka." — M. A. Gopalswami Iyengar : Op. cit. p. 4.

2. ಅಜಾಯಕರು ನಾಟಕದ ಚಾಕಟಿ ನ್ನು ಸಡಲಿಸವೆಯೆ . . . . . ಸಂಗೀತವನ್ನು ತನ್ನ ಕೈಯಾಳಿನಂತಿಟ್ಟು ಕೊಂಡಿದ್ದರು.

V. Sitaramaiah. *Rangabhoomi* May, 1931. p. 181.

3. Introduction of the harmonium was due to the influence of the Balliwala Company. Varadachar deputed one of his skillful artists—Soshagirao to Bombay for receiving training in playing on the instrument.

—C. Anandarao (MSS.)

4. The first dances on the stage were performed by 'Dancee Shanmarao' in about the year 1913.

—V. Sitaramaiah. Op. cit. p. 180.

Viswamitra and Vasistha, and the female roles discarded their socks, the Śakuntala of the hermitage was released from the heavy load of her ornaments and colourful gold lace, Śakuni no longer looked like a Rajput Sardar, nor Duryodhana like a Muslim Nawab nor Bhima as 'a ghost driving grotesque wizard'. The heroes of mythology were at last set free from the fashions and costumes of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup>

Better standards of stage-acting, a new stage-music and more sensible costuming and presentation were brought into vogue by the Ratnavali troupe. The Kannada theatre, thanks to Varadachar, would once again be what it had been before. It reached the opaque of its glory with Varadachar, whose "versatile art was god's solid gift to the Kannada world."<sup>2</sup> Sri Karanth was not very far from truth when he observed in 1939, that

"Some day when there was nothing of a stage, Varadacharya and Krishnamurthi not only built a stage for Karnatak but also earned a status for it. They had to stop somewhere and they did; but from that day to this, the Karnatak stage has not moved forward by an inch".<sup>3</sup>

#### FOLLOWERS OF THE METHOD :

The prominent among several professional troupes that came under the influence of Varadachar were *Sri Chāmundēśwari Karnāṭaka Nāṭaka Sabhā* (1919-1946), headed by N. Subbana a veteran actor of the Palace Company<sup>4</sup> and later, by R. Nagendra Rao, who was "a gift of Varadachar to the Kannada stage". The *Chandra Kālā Nāṭaka Maṇḍali* (1930-37) founded by Mohamad Peer, an actor of rare talent was also deeply influenced by the stage methods of Varadachar. The former troupe, an organised limited company with a Board of Directors and a galaxy of brilliant and experienced artists including G. Nagesh Rao, T. Mallappa, R. Nagendrarao, Krishnamurthi Rao, Mari Rao and B. Rachappa tried to make its performances imposing on the lines set by

1. Available accounts and photographic illustrations indicate that Varadachar himself dressed up for Dushyanta in the royal long coat with gold borders, tight trousers and a head dress with 'turai'. This was obviously far different from the modes of dressing at the times of Kālidasa, but the audience relished it, as that was the 'royal dress' in the 19th century and 'looked more natural than the 'Kings' of many an other troupe.'

2. V. Bhaskaran : *Theatre-I* p. 39.

3. K. S. Karanth—*Parishat Patrike*—Jan-March : 1939- p. 74.

4. Biography of the eventful life of this actor is given by C. Anandarao.

Varadachar with his 'colossal stage devices to create theatrical illusions'. The troupe staged mostly mythological plays like *Dānashoora Kārṇa*<sup>1</sup>, *Rāiasooya Yāga*, *Bhīṣma Pratignye* and *Veera Abhimanyu*, and toured with success, the neighbouring Telgu and Tamil regions. After the disruption of the Palace Company and the Ratnāvali Sabhā, it was the Chāmundeshwari Troupe that made an attempt to bring together all the veteran—but frustrated—artists together. It continued the traditions of Varadachar and yet tried a new administrative experiment by becoming a registered limited company.

The *Chandrakalā Mandali* of Mohamad Peer, with its short but glittering career of seven years, made an ineffaceable impression on Kannada audiences. Its emphasis was on dignity in showmanship and studied acting, on the lines prescribed by Varadachar. The troupe endeared itself to Kannadigas with its plays *Gautam Buddha* ( written by B. Puttaswamiah ), *Shahajahan* ( translation of Dwijendralal Roy's play ) and *Samsāra Nauka* ( by H. L. N. Simha ) in which Peer played leading roles, with M. V. Rajamma and H. L. N. Simha supporting him. The stage equipment of the troupe was comparatively meagre, its music was thin; it seldom had the stage devices to perform theatrical tricks and yet, it became the leading troupe of the Kannada stage, and held this position for sometime throwing into the shadows even a colossal concern like the Gubbi's. When Peer passed away all too suddenly in 1936, even his professional rivals paid homage to his genius as an actor, and the land mourned the loss of one of its most efficient dramatic troupes.

Prominent among other troupes which pursued with steadfast zeal the traditions of Varadachar were the *Shri Chandramaulēśwara Kripā Poṣita Nātaka Sabhā* of C. B. Mallappa who was given the title of *Abhinava Bhakta Śiromaṇi* on account of his grand portrayal of roles of saint poets like Kabirdas, Tukarām and Tulsidās, and the *Sri Saraswati Prasādit Nātaka Sdbhā* of M. V. Shivappa and M. V. Madappa, two gifted 'prose actors'. But, starting from the great Varadachar, most of the well known troupes— with the single exception of that of Peer—staged only mythological plays.

1. ಸನ್ನಿವೇಶಗಳಿಗೆ ನಿರ್ವಹಣಾಭಿವಿಧಾನದ ಛಾಯೆಗಳನ್ನು ಕೊಡುವುದರಲ್ಲಿ ಶ್ರೀ ಚಾಮುಂಡೇಶ್ವರಿಯವರನ್ನು ಮೀರಿಸಿದವರು ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಡಿನೊಳಗಿಲ್ಲವೆಂದರೆ ಅತಿಶಯೋಕ್ತಿಯಾಗಲಾರದು. ಭೃಂಗವು ಕರ್ಣನ ತೊಡೆಯನ್ನು ಕೊರೆಯುವುದು, ವಿದುರನ ಮನೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಹಾಲು ಉಕ್ಕುವುದು, ಕೃಷ್ಣನನ್ನು ಸೆರೆಹಿಡಿಯಲು ಬಂದಾಗ ನೂರಾರು ಕೃಷ್ಣರು ಕಾಣಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವುದು—ಪ್ರೇಕ್ಷಣೀಯವಾಗಿದ್ದವು.

Review of the play *Dana Shoora Karna*, *Rangabhoomi* : March, 1929. p. 109.

## A DEVIATION:

A deviation from the traditional and classical themes and 'dignity' in production was made by Hirannayya, one of the most talented and imaginative artists of the Karnatak stage. His became the most popular team in Karnataka after the demise of Mohammad Peer.

K. Hirannayya had varied experiences of the stage for about 15 years as a partner and actor in different professional troupes like the *Sugunabodhaka Samāja* of Bangalore (1932), the *Seetāmanohara Company* of T. Seetaramaiah of Tumkur (1934), the Gubbi Company (1935), and the *Sāhitya Sāmrājya Nāṭaka Mandali*, (1938). He had made himself known as a playwright and actor of no mean calibre,<sup>1</sup> before he set out to Madras to enter the films. After a good start in the film world,<sup>2</sup> he returned to Mysore to start his *Mitra Mandali* in July 1942. From that year—till his untimely death in 1954, the *Mitra Mandali* held the stage mainly on the merit of its SOCIAL plays which delivered to its crowded audiences "the most enjoyable insults." The *Mitramandali*, with its inimitable talent and zeal made the social play more popular than mythological and historical ones. The old modes had to make way for the new.

The troupe toured in Karnatak in 1944 with *Devadāsi*, its masterpiece. It came to Bangalore early in 1945, and staged 93 shows of *Devadāsi*. The troupe built a play-house for itself and staged from November 1945, 387 successive shows of *Devadāsi*. In 1946, Hirannayya set out on a tour of North Karnatak covering Belgaum, Jamkhandi, Sholapur, Raichur and other prominent Kannada centres. From 1947 onwards, the troupe got up a number of new social plays replete with humour, like *Makmal Topi* and *Panganāma*. Serious plays like *Devi Mandodari*, *Basaveshwara* and *Anasūya* were also staged but with scant success. Hirannayya with his inimitable genius immortalised characters like the pimp-Najukayya in the play *Devadāsi*, the henpecked Nāni in *Makmal Topi* and the cook Prāneshachāri in *Panganāma*. Under the surface of his bubbling mirth, there was always an under-current of passionate denunciation. His plays were at the core powerful attacks against social evils like drinking ( *Devadāsi* ) social inequality ( *Panganāma* ) and the problem of unequal marriage ( *Makmal Topi* ). The troupe earned a good name mainly because of its social

1. His plays *Echamanāyaka* and *Āśūpāśa* were staged with good success by the Gubbi Co., and the *Sāhitya Sāmrājya Nāṭaka Mandali*.

2. *Kṛṣṇa Prema*, *Bhakti*, *Atibāba*, *Tiruvallan*, *Sabhapati* and other films. His success in films brought great popularity to Hirannayya on the stage.

themes and intelligent use of the spoken word. Might be with the inevitable influence of Kailāsam,<sup>1</sup> Hirannayya was the first however, to introduce the Kannada dialect with all its angularities into the professional stage and it indeed provided great charm to his plays. He proved that the professional stage could do with the time honoured mythological themes, gorgeous but unnatural make-up, heavy settings and even the burden of stage songs which had tried the patience of 'modern' audiences. He was a bold experimentalist. He was sure of his themes and was in close touch with the changing taste of his audiences. In addition, he showed that the best method of managing a professional troupe was by avoiding the distance between the proprietor and the actor. His was literally a *Mitramandali*—a family of friends—and it included some of the gifted and experienced artists like Murarachar, Seetharamarao, Chinnappa and Ballary Lalita. Artists of this troupe defied the common notion—backed with noticeable evidences—that it is the second nature of an artist to 'hop from troupe to troupe' all the life long. It was indeed a great blow to the modern professional stage, that Hirannayya, an enthusiastic and intelligent playwright and a gifted actor died a premature death, bringing down the curtain on the glorious career of a good troupe.<sup>2</sup>

The professional theatre of Mysore that came into being in 1880 was nursed by the patronising palace and steadily developed with scores of troupes, some of which were able and sustaining while others, too feeble to do any thing substantial. Still, they strove to keep the stage going. The well established ones went out to different linguistic regions as the ambassadors of the art and culture of Karnatak. Mysore produced some of the most outstanding actors and troupes in South India who reigned on the theatre-world of the South for almost four decades from the beginning of the 20th century. There was a set-back in the Mysore Stage from 1930 owing to the untimely death of some of the veteran actors on the one hand, and to the diversion provided by the 'talking' films on the other. Most of the promising troupes went out of existence by 1945, with the countable exceptions like the Gubbi's concern—even that, a shadow of the original substance—and *Sāhitya Sāmrajya Nāṭaka Mandali* of Subbayya Naidu. Even these troupes like those in North Karnatak are visibly struggling for existence, but

1. A. N. Krishnarao : *Karnāṭakada Kalāvidaru*—II. p. 127.

2. It is heartening, however, that Narasihma Murthy, son of Hirannayya and one of the most talented young men of the Kannada Stage has put the troupe on its feet again.

even today, every village in Mysore has perhaps a dramatic troupe, and new troupes are yet springing up. From these existing relics, nothing much could be expected, but it is admirable that they have still clung to the stage, keeping the candle burning.

#### SOUTH CANARA :

The coastal home of Yakṣagāna does not seem to have made any tangible contribution towards building its own professional stage. Obviously, the coastal village was satisfied with its Yakṣagāna and the city, with the performances of visiting troupes from North Karnatak and Mysore. Some efforts were however made by enthusiastic artists like Narayana Setti and Ramayya Adapa who started their own Professional troupes. *Rājārājeśwari Nāṭaka Mandali* of Ramayya Adapa ( started in 1915 ) came to be known for its attractive shows of plays like *Prabhāvatī Darbar*, *Sadārame* and *Yuvati Vijaya*,—plays borrowed from the visiting Gubbi company and Shirahatti Venkoba Rao's troupe. Varadachar also visited the coastal towns frequently. The success of these troupes tempted every professional troupe of Karnatak to visit the coastal tract; and the coastal towns relished the performances of Garud Sadashivarao, Mohamad Peer and K. Hirannayya who visited it frequently.

The only exception to the otherwise sorry and short lived troupes of the coast was *Sri Ambā Prasāḍita Karnatak Nāṭaka Mandali* ( 1920–1940 ) owned by M. Ranganatha Bhatta. This troupe frequently toured the Kannada land. By the year 1930, the Mandali had become a competent rival even to the well established troupes in other parts of Karnatak. It came to be known for its imposing performances of mythological plays like *Dhruva* and *Harischandra*, the historical ones like *Ajanmakumāri* and *Sinhagaḍa* and popular social plays like *Rāyara Sose* and *Niśā Mahime*. Reviews of the time plays highly of the troupe for its ' natural ' settings, strikingly appropriate costumes and also the magnificent acting of Ranganatha Bhatta.<sup>1</sup> Sri Bhatta, with his imposing personality and ' thunderous voice ' played leading roles with great understanding. The masterpiece of the troupe was *Rāyara Sose* (Kannada version of the Marathi play—*Pantūchi Sūn*) in which Ranganatha Bhatta played the doctor with a mastery in the portrayal of

1. ಇವರ ನಾಟಕಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಅತ್ಯುತ್ತಮವಾಗಿ ಕಂಡದ್ದು ಪಾತ್ರಗಳ ಉಡಿಗೆ ತೊಡಿಗೆಗಳ ಹೊಂದಾಣಿಕೆಯ ಚಾತುರ್ಯ. ಅನೇಕ ಅವನಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಪ್ರಾಚೀನ ಚಿತ್ರಗಳ ಪರಿಚ್ಛೇದದಿಂದ ಅರಿಸಿ ತೆಗೆದಂತೆ ಅಚ್ಚು ಕಟ್ಟಾಗಿ ಕಾಣುತ್ತದೆ.

mixed emotions. The Kannada land respected his talent and honoured him with rewards and titles like *Abhinaya Bhūṣana* and *Nāṭyakalū Viśārada*.<sup>1</sup> Disbanding his troupe early in the forties, Ranganatha Bhatta sought a settled life in Mangalore. Many an other professional troupe came up in the coast, the prominent of which were *Manamōhan Nāṭaka Mandali*, *Panchalingeshwara Nāṭak Mandali* and *Rājarājeshwari Nāṭak Mandali* but they staged plays only to entertain the coastal towns of Karnatak.

#### BELLARY:

Bellary had for a long time preserved the traditions of the folk stage with its *Togalu Borbe* ( coloured image ), *Sootrada Bombe* ( the marionet ) and *Doddāta*, the popular folk show. Prominent professional troupes of Norh Karnatak and Mysore paid frequent visits to Bellary from the eightees of the last century, and in later years it became a passion with every troupe to visit the Bellary and Mangalore districts, for that was the land of their prosperity.

Bellary developed its own professional stage, though mainly with Telugu plays as its forte. The earlier plays were written by D. Krishna-macharlu, father of the Telugu drama. Later, Bellary became the home of a number of influential playwrights like K. Srinivasrao, D. Gopalacharlu, H. Hanumantha Gouda, Torangal Raje Rao, Balkundi Obalu Shastri, Subba Shastri and J. Doddangowda. A number of professional troupes also sprang up, particularly from 1890 onwards, in many a town and village like Hanagana Halli, Hampasagar, Kottur, Moraba, Kadlibail, Singeri, Alur and Rayadurga.<sup>2</sup> It looked as if there was no village nor town without a dramatic troupe in it,<sup>3</sup> but it could not be that they were all 'professional' in the correct

1. Sringeri, the noted seat of orthodox Hindu religion honoured him with the title *Nāṭya Kalāviśārada* in Dec., 1929, presenting an address which said :

..... ಈ ನಾಟಕ ಸಂಘದವರು ಸುಶೀಲರಾಗಿಯೂ ತಮ್ಮ ವೇಷಕ್ಕೆ ಅನುರೂಪವಾದ ಮಾತು, ಅಭಿನಯ, ಸಮಯೋಚಿತವಾದ ರಸ, ಮತ್ತು ಜನರ ಮನಸ್ಸನ್ನು ಆಕರ್ಷಿಸುವ ಕುಶಲತೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಬಹಳ ಸಮರ್ಥರಾಗಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಇವರು ಅಭಿನಯಿಸತಕ್ಕ ನಾಟಕಗಳು ಲೋಕಸ್ವಭಾವವನ್ನೂ, ಸುಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಪದ್ಧತಿಯನ್ನೂ, ಕರ್ತವ್ಯ ಜ್ಞಾನವನ್ನೂ, ಧರ್ಮದ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯನ್ನೂ ಜನರ ಮನಸ್ಸಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಸಂಪೂರ್ಣವಾಗಿ ನೆಲೆಗೊಳಿಸುತ್ತವೆ.

ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ : ಜನವರಿ ೧೯೨೯ — ಪುಟ ೪೫.

2. The professional troupe of Hirekal is said to have been the best of its kind in Bellary. It earned a good name and even built a play-house in the village as a standing monument of the theatrical art of the village.
3. *Kalī* : proceedings of the 3rd Drama Conference, Bellary, 1951. pp. 162-176.

sense of the word. There were a few, however, like the *Saraswati Nataka Sabhā*, that was started in 1912 at Koktur ( by Jagateru Veerabhadrappa ) *Basaveśwara Nataka Mandali* of Harapanahalli which toured the Kannada country in 1928, staging plays like *Hemaraddi Mallamma*, *Chitrāngada*, *Kurukṣetra*, and *Sati Sāvitrī*; and also the *Māruthi Nataka Company* of Alur. It was essentially during the 'months of leisure' that many of these troupes functioned, and on such occasions each troupe tried to collect as many good artists as possible on 'fixed remunerations for the season'.

Apart from the enthusiastic service of its professional troupes, Bellary championed the cause of the Kannada stage by conducting Drama Festivals and Conferences. The credit of such an effort goes to the village Joladarashi which convened the first Conference in 1948 under the presidentship of Garud Sadashivarao, the second in 1950 with R. Nagendra Rao in the Chair, and the third in 1952 with A. N. Krishna Rao presiding over. The Conferences aimed at bringing together the playwrights, actors and proprietors of Karnatak to discuss the contemporary problems and future prosperity of the theatre and consider the methods of preserving and revitalising the stage. Joladarashi is worthy of being emulated in this regard because of its tireless work to bring the professional stage into stability.

#### THE NIZAM KARNATAK:

The frequently visiting professional troupes of Maharashtra seem to have been responsible in inspiring the Kannada speaking areas of the Nizam Karnatak to staging plays in Kannada and later, to building up professional troupes. The early performances were annual amateur affairs as on the occasions like *Ganeśotsava* and *Śivāī Jayanti*. The first decade of the 20th Century saw the spring of professional troupes the prominent of which came from Kalburgi<sup>1</sup> and Devdurga.<sup>2</sup> These troupes toured in important centres of the Nizam Karnatak and inspired the towns like Bidar, Raichur and Koppal to have their own professional groups. Mostly mythological plays were staged with 'an over-emphasis on colourful costumes and deliberate acting'-and-none of the troupes moved out to other parts of Karnatak. It may be said however, that the Nizam Karnatak provided to the professional stage, two of its

1. *Shivasuta Prāsādita Mandali* of Kalburgi provided the first opportunity to Garud to appear on the stage. *Kannada Stage Centenary* Vol. I-p. 74.
2. The Devadurga troupe was the most popular dramatic company in the Nizam's area with its imposing showmanship of mythological plays'. Mudavidu Krishnarao. *Jayakarnatak* : XII. 11. pp. 154-55.

outstanding architects in Shirahatti Venkobarao and Gurud Sada-shivarao, both of whom came from Koppal. Both of them paid frequent visits to the Nizam Karnatak.

This brief survey of the careers of some of the representative professional troupes of Karnatak suggests that their story covers a span of about eighty years in three distinct stages :

1. 1875 to 1900: The period of experiment and establishment.
2. 1900 to about 1940: The Golden age of talent and prosperity.
3. 1940 onwards: The period of competition and decline.

During the first period of about twenty-five years the professional troupes, both in North Karnatak and Mysore seem to have been at work for self-consolidation with the aim of providing 'professional entertainment' to variegated tastes. The second period witnessed the full growth of the institution with its influence penetrating into neighbouring regions. It was during this period that many of the most outstanding playwrights, actors and producers of Karnatak contributed their mite in making the Kannada stage most impressive in South India. The grand galaxy of artists of this period included Garud Sadashivarao, Vamanarao Master, Handignur Siddharamappa, Basavaraja Mansur, Gangubai Guledgud and others in North Karnatak, Ranganatha Bhatta and K. Seetharama Shastri in the coastal tract, T. Raghavachari and Vattam Shamarao in Bellary and N. Subbanna, Varadachar, Veeranna, Mohammad Peer, M. V. Rajamma, Hirannayya and others in Mysore. The professional stage during its golden age, dictated its own forms and fashions, and moulded the people's tastes even with its mythological plays. This span of about forty years was obviously the brightest period in the career of the professional stage. During the third phase of its career after 1930, the professional stage had to face a sudden and dangerous change in the taste of the people owing to the talking film that made its inroad even into villages. Soon the city play-houses came to be converted into film-houses. The new born amateur stage diverted the attention of the educated section of the audience from the professional stage. The latter's loss was complete when gifted stage artists like Nagendrarao, H. L. N. Simha, Pantalu, Handiganur Siddharamappa, M. V. Rajamma, H. Ramachandra Shastri and scores of others gave up the stage for careers in the film industry. Even Veeranna had become essentially film-minded. Peer seemed for some time the only glow of the stage but with his untimely death, the theatre lost much of its strength. Several troupes became alive to the great change in people's taste and saw their future in making drastic changes in their selection of plays and shownanship. Some of them hastened to take

up social themes and to cut short the duration of their performances to less than three hours. The troupes of Veeranna, of Subbiah Naidu, of Enigi Balappa, of Hirannayya and others survived only as they compromised with the changing tastes of their audiences. Many an other troupe lagged behind the times only to lose its moorings and influence. The trend was towards new themes and new technique, towards shorter and cheaper entertainment with which the film and the amateur stage were giving a challenge to the professional stage.

#### THEMES AND PLAYWRIGHTS: THEMES FROM THE MYTHOLOGIES:

During the eighty years of its career, the Kannada professional stage discovered a number of playwrights to supply stageable plays, but out of these, only a few seem to have been original and creative. The theatre being commercial, its playwright could not be totally indifferent to the people's taste. Apart from making adequate provision for acting, music and transfer-scenes, the writer had to remember that the play had to confine to an acting space of a limited time and that it had to avoid multiplicity of characters and subsidiary incidents in the interest of the unity of impression. Unlike the novelist or the poet, the playwright was bound down by several conditions. And Bernard Shaw spoke of them:

"I do not select my methods: they are imposed upon me by a hundred considerations; by the physical considerations of the theatrical representation, by the economics of theatrical commerce, by the nature and limits of the art of acting, by the capacity of the spectators for understanding what they see and hear and by the accidental circumstances of the particular production in hand."<sup>1</sup>

It is true that these considerations came to affect the stage seriously in the present century; but even in the initial stages of the career of our theatre, these considerations could not have been totally ignored though not much heeded to. As a matter of fact, there was hardly any critical taste with the audiences of that time; it had to be *created* by the playwright. But the plays themselves could not have been classical in nature and lofty in literary merit if the writer had blindly served the undependable taste of the audience.<sup>2</sup> In any case the playwright had first to be sure of his theme; a theme that would 'serve all tastes'. He unhesitatingly hit upon *mythological* themes drawn from

1. George Bernard Shaw in New York Times-quoted by A. Nicoll. *The Theory of Drama* p. 33.

2. The words of K. Bhimarao bear considerable meaning in this regard: (*contd*)

the epics and romantic legend, which had tremendous vitality to hold the audiences because of the triumph of the good over the evil and also the presence of elements of devotion (*Bhakti*) and morality (*Neeti*) in them. In the last decade of the 19th century, it was not considered a befitting theme, if it dealt with a problem that is general to-day and exceptional tomorrow, and so, the playwright wrote on themes "which were richly symbolic of an eternal and all powerful force"; and only the epics could supply them.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the professional troupe began to present in a more appropriate scene, settings, stage devices and a more intelligent use of the spoken word, *the same theme* that Yaksagāna presented in colour, costumes, dance and music. Themes from the epics seemed to hold the Kannada stage forever.

Prominent among the playwrights who wrote *original* plays which were based on Pauranic themes and who actively associated themselves with professional troupes were Shāntakavi (Sakkari Bālāchārya), Srinivāsakavi, Garud Sadāshivarao, Narayanrao Huilgol and Kandagal Hanamantharao in North Karnatak and Bellave Narahari Shāstri, Nanjangud Srikanta Sāstri and B. Puttaswamiah in Mysore.

*Shāntakavi* wrote essentially for the *Kritapura Nataka Mandali* of Gadag and later for the *Nargund Dramatic Troupe*. He made a mention of nine plays—all on Pauranic themes, as to have been staged by the former troupe and 'four or five' by the latter.<sup>2</sup> They seemed to be the

“ಪ್ರಸಿದ್ಧ ಕವಿಗಳು ಪ್ರಾಬಲ್ಯಕ್ಕೆ ಬರುವುದಕ್ಕೂ ಉತ್ತಮ ನಾಟಕಗಳು ಹುಟ್ಟುವುದಕ್ಕೂ ಕವಿಗಳು ತಮ್ಮ ತೃಪ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಬಯಸಿ ಬರೆದುದೇ ಕಾರಣವಾಗದೆ ಜನರ ಚಿತ್ತ ಬಾಪಲ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ಅನುಸರಿಸಿ ಜನರನ್ನು ಮೆಚ್ಚಿಸುವುದಕ್ಕೆ ಮೊದಲಿಟ್ಟು ಅವರು ನಾಟಕಗಳನ್ನು ಬರೆದಿದ್ದ ಪಕ್ಷದಲ್ಲಿ ಅವರಿಗಾಗಲಿ ಅವರ ಕೃತಿಗಳಿಗಾಗಲಿ ಯಾವ ಯೋಗ್ಯತೆಯೂ ಬರುತ್ತಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ಆದರಿಂದಲೇ ಆ ಕಾಲದ ನಾಟಕಗಳು ಅನೇಕ ಶತಮಾನಗಳು ಕಳೆದು ಹೋದರೂ ಇನ್ನೂ ಪ್ರಶಸ್ತವಾಗಿಯೇ ಇವೆ.”

—ಕೆ. ಭೀಮರಾವ್, ನಾಟಕದ ಕಷ್ಟಗಳು : ಪರಿಷತ್ಪತ್ರಿಕೆ : ಅಕ್ಟೋಬರ್ ೧೯೨೨ ಪುಟ ೧೯೯

1. Pauranic plays belong to the '*Pratima Vidhana*' of which Sri K. V. Puttappa observed.

“.....ಪ್ರತಿಮಾದೃಷ್ಟಿಗೆ ವಸ್ತುವಿಗಿಂತಲೂ ಆ ವಸ್ತುವಿಗೆ ಕಾರಣವಾದ ಅಥವಾ ಪ್ರೇರಣೆ ವಾದ ಶಕ್ತಿ ಅಥವಾ ಚೈತನ್ಯವೇ.....ಅಗ್ರಗಣ್ಯವಾದ ಪರಮ ಪ್ರಯೋಜನದ ಕಲಾ ವಿಷಯ. ಪ್ರತಿಕೃತಿವಿಧಾನ ಪ್ರಧಾನವಾಗಿ ವಸ್ತುನಿಷ್ಠವಾದರೆ ಪ್ರತಿಮಾ ವಿಧಾನವು ತತ್ತ್ವ ನಿಷ್ಠ.....ಪುರಾಣಗಳ ಪ್ರಪಂಚವೇ ಪ್ರತಿಮಾ ಪ್ರಪಂಚ.....”

ಶತಮಾನ ಸಂಚಿಕೆ : II ಪುಟ ೩-೪.

2. *Ushāharāṇa*, *Sriyāla Satva Parīkṣe*, *Vatsalāharāṇa*, *Sundopasunda Vadha*, *Kichakavādhe*, *Sudhanva Vadha*, *Seetārāṇa Pravesha*, *Shākuntalōpākhyāna* and *Chandrāvali Charitre* were staged by the Kritapura Mandali. *Seetā-śayamvara*, *Kālāsura*, *Mayuradhvaṇa* and *Pratāpa* were written for the Nargund Company.

Shāntakavi: *Nataka* : *Prabhāta*-monthly. March, 1919. pp. 7 & 8.

revitalised stage-versions of Bhāgavatara āta, devoid of the latter's dance. They provided theatrical scope and contained humorous roles which were occasionally odd, like the commander in *Ushāharaṇa* who mixed up Urdu words in his talk, or Nakshatramāla, a cheti of Chandrāvali (*Chandrāvali Charitre*), who employed English words like "warrant" and "magistrate".<sup>1</sup> His plays were received with great enthusiasm both by the city and village audiences and they sustained themselves on the stage for over twenty years.

*Venkannacharya Agalagatti* (Srinivāsa Kavi) wrote plays for the Halsigi Dramatic Troupe on mythological themes like *Shrimati Parinaya*, *Madālasā Parinaya*, *Draupadi Vastrāpaharaṇa* and *Bhaumāsura Vadha*.

*Garud Sadashivarao* and *Kandagal Hanumantharao* may not claim much credit for original themes, but indeed, they gave very original touches to the prevailing pauranic themes and made them sustain for decades. *Pāduka Pattābhiṣeka*, *Sudāmadēva*, *Sairandhree* and *Kam-savadha* written by Garud may be cited as some of the most attractive stage-plays of North Karnatak. Couched in dignified language and replete with appropriate humour<sup>2</sup>, these plays were staged both by Garud's troupe and others. Hanumantharao Kandagal paid a particular attention to 'characterisation', and apart from his own troupe, many an other professional company of North Karnatak staged his *Akṣayāmbara*, *Lankādahan*, *Bānasiga Bhīma*, *Kurukṣetra* and *Chitrāṅgada*.

The most prominent of playwrights who wrote for the professional stage in Mysore was *Bellave Narahari Shastri* who was closely associated with the Gubbi Company. E. P. Rice referred to him as early as in 1921 as 'one of the most prolific dramatic authors'.<sup>3</sup> He is said to have written for the stage about forty full length plays.<sup>4</sup> Possibly every one of them was staged, as it was written specially for Veeranna. A few of his plays like *Kṛiṣṇa Leela* (1919), *Yama Garvabhanga* (1922) and *Mārkaṇḍeya* (1932) held the stage for years at length and remain popular to this day. A highly individualistic development of the plot, fully worked out characterisation, dignified

1. 'ವಿರಹಿಗಳನ್ನು ಎಳೆದಿಳಿದು ತರಲಿಕ್ಕೆ ವಾರಂಟುಕೊಟ್ಟು ಮಾರಮ್ಯಾಜಿಸ್ಟ್ರಿಟನು ಕಳುಹಿಸಿದ ಕರಿ ಅಂಗಿಯವರ ಹಿಂದೋ'

2. It was strange however, that the Court wrestlers of Kamsa— Mustika and Chanura carried their conversation in Urdu—in the mythological play *Kamsa Vadha*.

3. E. P. Rice: *History of Kanarese Literature Heritage of India Series* p. 100

4. *Kannada Stage Centenary*. Vol. I. P. 123.

language, well balanced proportion of music and humour and witty and imaginative dialogues<sup>1</sup>— are some of the features which have made his plays highly successful. Bellave retained the traditional methods of play-presentation but made them relished with new techniques and stage devices.<sup>2</sup> The under current of *Bhakti* in his plays added lustre to them. He deviated from the old plays which had “95 per cent of music and 5 per cent of spoken prose,”<sup>3</sup> and set new fashions in writing for the stage. He remained faithful to the mythological theme but was brilliant in re-interpreting them with striking imagination, and also in providing scope in the play for effective showmanship. It was a happy coincidence that Bellave had the Gubbi Company to produce his plays and the Gubbis had Bellave to write for them.

Another similar happy combination that brought about fruitful results on the professional stage of Mysore was that of Nanjanagud Srikanta Shāstri, a scholar-playwright and A. V. Varadachar the great actor-producer. Srikanta Shastri made a prolific contribution to the dramatic literature by his translation of Telugu plays written by Veeresha Lingam Pantulu. *Kanakalatā Parinaya* and *Tilottamā* are his original creations out of the Paurāṇic lore. His other plays like *Seetā Swayamvara*, *Abhignāna Pradhāna*, *Seetā Parityāga*, *Rajasooya Yāga*, *Vijayābhyudaya*, *Dhruva Vijay* and *Viṣṇu Leela* are based on dramatic episodes in the mythologies and have remained popular on the Mysore stage. His deep learning and a discerning eye for details made the plays of Srikanta Shastri ‘ennobling’, in spite of each play having been split into eight or more acts. It is true that some times the main theme itself got mixed up and diffused with the importance given to details.<sup>4</sup> Yet his plays remained popular on the stage, and the brilliant showman-

1. ಮಕರಂದ : ಅದೇನಯ್ಯ ಮುಕುಂದ ಅಂತಹ ಅನಂದ ?

ಕೃಷ್ಣ : ರಾಧೆಯವದನಾರವಿಂದ !

2. He made the opening scene of every play highly gorgeous in order to arrest the audience. The tradition of getting some ‘God’ on the stage to bless the play was maintained by Ballave but as in *Krishnaleela*, he made it very artistic. As the curtain went up, the spectator would behold all the *Devas* praying to Vishnu entreating him to eradicate the evil; the Lord then would bless them to success.

3. Bellave Narahari Shastri : *Stage Centenary Vol. I*, p. 37.

4. *Rajasooya Yāga* portrayed all the ten *Avatāras* in detail in the context when Dharmaraja praised Krishna as most eminently suited for *Agrapooja*. In *Vijayābhyudaya*, the entire story of the *Digvijaya* of Arjuna was portrayed including even the episode of *Draupadī Vastrāpaharāṇa* though, strictly, the episode has no place in the play.

ship of Varadachar also was in a large measure responsible for making the playwright so popular.

A number of others contributed original plays on Paurāṇic themes. *Indrakeela Vijay Nātakam* of Mysore Seetharama Shastri, *Shrīmatī Pariṇaya* of Alasingachar, *Nala Damayanti* of Kerur Vasudevachar, *Mandodari* and *Nachiketa* of C. K. Venkataramiah are some of those plays which added colour and dignity to the professional stage of Karnatak. B. Puttaswamiah, a contemporary playwright with his ingenuous method of infusing modern thought into Paurāṇic themes wrote plays like *Kurukṣetra*, *Sati Tulasi* and *Daśāyatāra* which are imposing and essentially theatrical like those of C. K. Venkataramiah.

#### THEMES FROM HISTORY :

The professional stage seems to have depended almost entirely on Paurāṇic themes for about three decades for its consolidation. But after the partition of Bengal in 1905 which gave a shake up to the conscience of the country, Karnatak also suddenly awakend to the glory of its history,— particularly to the great past of Vijayanagara and the noble work of many a patriot like Kittoor Chennamma and Baba Sahib of Nargund. Yet the professional theatre 'had to move slowly as it was still not sure of the taste of its audiences'. As first experiments in historical themes, professional troupes brought on the stage, plays written on lives of Saint poets, for, these themes contained both Paurāṇic and historical elements. The singleness of a lofty moral purpose championed by the Saint and his determination to destroy the evil and *Maya* in order to attain the sublime happiness, and then, an undercurrent of *Bhakti*, made the plays like *Sant Tukārām*, *Tulsidās* and *Rāmadās* highly popular. *Sharana Basava* and *Kabirdās* of Garud and *Sant Sakhubai* of Vamanarao Master came to hold the stage of North Karnatak. *Hemaraddi Mallamma* of Bellave and *Gautama Budha* and *Akka Mahadevi* written by B. Puttaswamiah drew crowded houses in Mysore. Though historical in settings, these plays were essentially devotional in spirit and remained semi-mythological in their import. They occupied an equal place along with those based on the Paurāṇic themes.

Mostly after 1920, plays based on lives of patriots who sacrificed themselves for the sake of the country came to be staged. *Rājabhakti*,<sup>1</sup>

1. *Rājabhakti* is a translation of the Marathi play—*Rākshasi Mahatvākāṅkshhe*. A review of the play as staged by the Gubbi Company praised its internal worth and production values. —*Rangabhoomi*. Nov., 1928. pp. 47—51.

*Karnatak Sāmrajya*, *Swāmi Niṣṭhe* and *Tējaswini* were staged by the Gubbi Company. These and *Ecchamanāyaka* written and staged by Garud Sadashivarao, *Shaha Shivaji* and *Tippu Sultan* staged by the Halageri Nataka Mandali could be cited as examples of highly popular historical plays. Almost all prominent professional troupes staged plays built around patriotic heroes and heroines like Kittur Chennamma, Belavadi Mallamma, Kittur Rudrambe and Sangolli Rayanna. These plays threw a flood of light on the patriotic heroes and heroines of Karnatak and inspired people against alien rule. Another play in this line that observes a special mention is *Nargund Bandāya* written by Achyutarao Huilgol. Episodes from the history of Mysore were recreated in all their grandeur and dignity by 'Samsa' whose *Vigaḍa Vikramarāya*, *Ratna Simhāsana* and *Suguna Gambheera*, could well suit the stage if ever they were seriously taken up by the professional stage. *Shahajahan*, a Kannada rendering by B. Puttaswamiah of Dwijendralal Roy's Bengali play became highly popular when staged by Peer and H. L. N. Simha.

*Chandragupta* a Kannada rendering by M. N. Chowdappa of the Bengali original did stand to a grand stature, when it was staged by M. Veerbhadrarayya's troupe in Mysore. Quite a number of other plays like *Chatrapati Śivāji*, and *Yaśodhara* of Masti, *Mayura* of Devudu, *Vidyāranya Vijaya* of D. V. Gundappa, *Raktākṣi* of K. V. Puttappa touched significant historical themes, but unfortunately they were not taken up seriously by the professional stage.

The historical theme brought about a necessary change in the showmanship of plays apart from providing some scope for the first time, to original interpretation of themes by the playwright. It however, bound the methods of production with a defined type of settings, costumes and presentation. It placed an emphasis on naturalness in acting. Stage-songs gradually made way for good dialogue and dramatic action; symbolism of the Paurāṇic play made way for material suggestion and the emphasis on entertainment shifted to calculated education. In spite of the odd battle-scenes and 'humorous' pathetic sequences in the historical play, it became acceptable for it led the way towards the natural and realistic elements in the stage play. It replaced the mythological play which was the exclusive occupant of the stage and provided something new and different. Imaginative artists like Garud and Peer recreated historical heroes more to inspire the audiences than to entertain them. Unlike the Paurāṇic play, the historical ones came with a specific purpose and hit a middle mark

in the march of the theme from the Paurāṇic to the social plane, both from the points of literary content and methods of showmanship.

#### SOCIAL THEMES:

“Our stage is overflowing with Gods and Goddesses and kings and queens; it is high time we gave them some rest and discovered the God in man” declared Harindranath Chattopadhyaya in 1930.<sup>1</sup> He was voicing the growing unrest towards the then crowding mythological plays ‘where the heroes of the epics performed the same old tricks over again’. Music used to run riot and the stagy intonation that missed ‘the suppleness and changing rhythms’ of the speech of life was the normal fare. Still the stage was living and hundreds of people drawn from all classes flocked to the theatre mainly ‘owing to the great merit of the actor rather than the play itself’<sup>2</sup>. The cry went up for the ‘intellectual’ play in preference to the ‘physical performance’ of mythological ones. It was evidently a demand of the intelligentsia, but it was a *demand* all the same, the outcome of a new age influenced by western education, patriotic movement in the country and the challenge of a growing amateur stage. The demand had to be met by the professional stage for the sake of survival. It was not to be a question of complete replacement of the mythological and historical themes but one of finding place for something different, something more intimate and something earthly on the stage.

The social theme had already come to the Kannada stage with the translation of *Mṛcchakatika* in the last decade of the 19th century. Srikanta Shastri had translated a number of plays of Veeresha Lingam Pantalu from Telugu. But it was after the year 1920, that the social theme was taken up by professional troupes. Imaginative playwrights like Kerur Vasudevacharya, Garud Sadashivarao, Irani Shantappa, N. K. Huilgol, Hanumantharao Kandgal, G. G. Hegde & others in north Karnatak and M. L. Srikantagowda, G. V. Ramaswami Iyengar,<sup>3</sup> H. L. N. Simha, K. Hirannayya, Hunsur Krishnamurthi in Mysore

1. Presidential Speech in the Andhra Nāṭaka Parishat. *Kalā*—Sept., 1931. p. 107.

2. “ಈಗ ಅಡುತ್ತಿರುವ ನಾಟಕಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಅನೇಕ ನಾಟಕಗಳು ೧೫-೨೦ ವರ್ಷಗಳ ಹಿಂದೆ ಸತ್ತಿ ರಬೇಕಾದವು. ಮತ್ತೆ ಕೆಲವು ನಾಟಕವೆಂದು ಹೇಳಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲೂ ಯೋಗ್ಯತೆ ಇಲ್ಲದವು. ಇವುಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮೂರೂ ಮುಕ್ಕಾಲು ಪಾಲು ನಟರ ಕೀರ್ತಿ, ಅಭಿನಯ ಕಾಶಲ್ಯಗಳಿಂದ ಬದುಕಿದೆ.” —ಆ. ಸ. ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾಯ : ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ—ಸಪ್ಟೆಂಬರ್ ೧೯೨೭-ಪುಟ ೧೫.

3. G. V. Ramaswami Iyengar was the playwright-proprietor of *Karnāṭaka Nāṭaka Mandali* (1930—1937). *Nirbhāgya Bhārati* and *Samsāra Sāra* fighting the social evils of drinking and prostitution were the most popular of his 17 stage plays.

wrote plays on social themes and they contained considerable dramatic element. They Generally dealt with social evils and mal-adjustments like unequal marriage, drinking, tyranny of social customs, dangers of blind faith, unsound education and the like.

The first professional troupe that specialised in popularising plays built on social themes was the famed Halgeri Company with its versatile proprietor-actors Dodda Jettappa and Chikka Jettappa. *Stree*, *B. A.*, *Paṭhāni Pāsha*, *Chalti Duniya* and *Black Market* were among its popular plays. They infused a spirit of patriotism and aimed at the eradication of social evils and artificialities. The *Mitra Mandali* of K. Hirannayya staged long runs of social plays like *Devadāsi* and *Makmal Topi* that pleaded for prohibition and emancipation of women. Garud's performances of *Paschāttapa* (Vishama Vivāha) and *Satya Sankalpa*, though in historical settings, were essentially social in spirit and implications. Even the Gubbi Company which had its mainstay in mythological themes soon took up social plays like *Nishā Mahime*, *Sāhukar*, *Kālachakra* and *Aḍḍadāri*, all throwing light on the social and political oddities and artificialities from the angle of humour. *Rāyara Sose* of the *Ambā Prasādira Nataka Mandali* remained very popular on the professional stage. *Samsāra Nauka* staged by Peer proved that professional troupes could well prosper with social plays. Recently, though written on a contemporary episode of topical interest, Hunsur Krishnamurthi's *Dharma Ratnākara*, a biting parody replete with irony and humour, held the professional stage in Mysore and drew crowded houses. Simha's *Abhā Hudagi*, a parody on the manners of 'educated' girls was also staged with great success in Mysore.

The social theme which is 'intimately connected with the people' created new values and brought about a revolution both in the writing for the stage and methods of play—presentation. It set at naught the accepted belief that the mythological play alone could hold the professional stage; it tempered down the stage language towards naturalness; it rationalised the manner of acting; it replaced the stage music with humour; it discarded the fabulous settings, scenery and other spectacular elements, and finally, it catered more to the mind than to the eye. In this sense, the social play came to be regarded as more intellectual in nature and more rational in presentation than the mythological and historical plays. The social theme brought about a change in the outlook of the writer, the actor and also the spectator. Very gradually, the stiffness of the stage-language began to make way for informality. Essentially after the second decade of the present century, the profes-

sional stage came a step closer to society by dealing with its problems and evils. In such a role, it came to be regarded first as the educator of the society and then its entertainer.

#### OBLIGATION TO THE DRAMATIC LITERATURE OF OTHER LANGUAGES :

*Sanskrit* : The professional theatre had become a sudden reality in Karnatak, inspired by the touring Marathi and Parsi troupes. Its most urgent need was suitable dramatic literature. North Karnatak had prepared itself to an extent to meet the emergency, and its first-troupe came into existence after the plays themselves were written by Shāntakavi. The Mysore area was not prepared for the emergency, and naturally, to start with, it had to fall back on Kannada translations of reputed plays in other languages, particularly in Sanskrit and English.

There was nothing unseemly in falling back on the Sanskrit drama. The Marathi Stage was gaining both stability and popularity because of translations of Sanskrit plays by Rajwade, Krishnasastri Chipalunkar, Lele and others. The Court stage of Karnatak had the influence of Sanskrit drama even in the times of Chicka Devaraj Wodeyar. One could be sure of the merit of the play with regard to its dramatic element, literary merit and scope for production. The popular taste would be well served as the theme of the play was invariably mythological. It had a beautiful blending of poetry and prose, providing ample scope for music and acting. Sanskrit drama, thus, looked ideal from all points of view, particularly at the hour of need.

Chamaraja Wodeyar, the Maharaja of Mysore, accordingly instructed the learned poets of his court to translate into Kannada, well known plays from the Sanskrit dramatic literature. This yielded rich results in that almost all the well known Sanskrit plays were rendered into Kannada both by the court poets and other learned pandits. A significant feature of the first translations was in that they were entirely faithful to originals unlike *Mitravinda Govinda*. Prominent among the scholars who brought successful translations were Basavappa Śāstri, Sosale Ayyā Śāstri, Giribhattara Tammayya, Jayarāyācharya, Dhondo Narasimha Mulbagal, Anantanarayana Śāstri, Shivashankara Śāstri, Nanjangud Subba Śāstri and Devashikhāmani Alasingarācharya. The Palace Company was placed in a happy position to try experiments in the theatre as it did not have to cater to the popular taste and thus, it staged some of these translations, the most successful of which were *Kannada Śakuntala* of Basavappa Śāstri, *Vikramorvasi* of Ayyaśāstri, *Mṛchakatika* of Nanjangud Subba Śāstri and *Veṇi Samhāra* of Jaya-

rāyāchārya. The example set by the Palace Company was followed by A. V. Varadāchar, who staged with great success, kannada versions of *Śākuntala* and *Ratnāvali*. From the inception of the modern theatre in Mysore early in the Eighties, up to the end of the 19th century, plays drawn from the Sanskrit originals seem to have held the stage.

#### BASAVAPPA ŚĀSTRĪ:

Among the court poets who rendered Sanskrit plays into Kannada, Kari Basavappa Sastri deserves a special mention both in regard to the quality and quantity of his contribution. Gifted with classical learning and a poet's imagination, Basavappa Śāstri seems to have made a mark in composing a merited poetical work *Krishnarājābhīyudaya* even at the age of 18.<sup>1</sup> He was a gifted *gamaki*, capable of musical rendering of the classics.<sup>2</sup> He is said to have contributed 28 literary compositions ( 17 in Kannada and 11 in Sanskrit ) and his renderings of *Śākuntala*, *Vikramorvaśīya*, *Ratnāvali*, *Uttararāma Charite*, *Mālati Mādhava* and *Chandā Kausika* are available. Of these, *Śākuntala* has been acclaimed by critics as the most faithful rendering of the inimitable Kalidasa.<sup>3</sup> Of the translations of *Śākuntala* into several languages, the Kannada version by Basavappa Śāstri is hailed as the nearest to the original, revealing every subtlety of Kalidasa's imagination, feeling and expression. The Palace was naturally proud of honouring him with the title *Abhinava Kālidasa*. The Court Theatre of Mysore staged Śāstri's renderings, to the great relish and enjoyment of its LEARNED audience.

Because of its mythological theme, unsurpassed brilliance, subtlety in the development and grand portrayal, *Śākuntala* has come to be translated into Kannada by a number of scholars, and to-day, there are as many as seven different renderings of the play, including that of Basavappa Śāstri.

1. ಪದಿನೆಂಟು ವಯಸ್ಸಿನೊಳೊದ  
ವಿದ ಕವಿತಾ ಶಕ್ತಿಯಿಂದೆ ಬುಧನವದಕ್ಕಂ  
ಮುದಮೊಗೆಯೆ ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾಜಾ  
ಭೃಗುದಯನೊಪ್ಪೊಂದು ಕೃತಿಯನಿರದಾಗಿಸಿದಂ—

—ನೆಂಕಟರಮಣಾಚಾರ್ಯ: ಗರಳಪುರಿ ಶಾಸ್ತ್ರಗಳ ಜೀವನ ಚರಿತ್ರೆ.

2. “ ನಿಲ್ಲನಾಂತೆಣ್ಣೆ ಬಿಂಕಾರರವಂ ತೀವುತ್ತಿ  
ರಲ್ವಾ ಬಸವಕವಿ ವಚೋಧಾರಮೇಲಂ ಕರ್ಣಪೂರಂ”

—R. Tata in *Krishnasakti* of Udipi. Quoted by M. G. Nanjundaradhya.  
Op. cit. 115.

3. ಎಸ್. ರಾಮಚಂದ್ರರಾವ್ : ‘ಬಸವ್ವನವರ ಭಾಷಾಂತರ ಶಕ್ತಿ’ ಶರಣ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ II. ೨.

But, *Sākuntala* was first translated into Kannada by Churamuri Sheshagiri Rao in 1869. He intended it for the *popular stage* unlike Basavappa Śāstri. His rendering of the play in easy flowing homely prose and lucid lyrics set in charming native tunes ( *Jāvadi*, sung in the homes of North Karnatak ) captured the common people for whom it was meant. Churamuri had every reason to be proud of his translation because of its faithfulness to the original and its simple prose and charming poetry.<sup>1</sup>

“ For some years there was no home in which women did not sing lyrics from Churamuri’s *Śākuntala* nor was there a musical performance which did not include a couple of them. ”<sup>2</sup>

It is strange however, that it was not taken up seriously by the professional troupes in North Karnatak.

Among the other versions of *Sākuntala*, the one of B. Krishnappa is a rendering in prose and of B. Narahari Śāstri is more an adaptation than a translation. M. Krishnarao, Shankara Shastri and Baleraa Dixit have also rendered it into Kannada. The success of *Śākuntala* when staged by the Palace Company inspired many a scholar-poet to render every well known Sanskrit play into Kannada.

To say that almost every well known Sanskrit play has been rendered into Kannada would be no exaggeration of the fact.

*Swapnavāsavadatta* and *Pancharātra* of Bhāsa, *Mṛicchakatika* of Śūdraka, all the three plays of Kalidasa, *Mudrarākshasa* of Viśakhadatta, *Ratnāvali* of Harṣa,<sup>3</sup> *Uttararāmcharite* of Bhavabhūti, *Veṇi Samhara* of Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa, and *Chanda Kaushika* of Kshemeshwara—are all rendered into Kannada and each one of them has been differently rendered by two or more scholars; but not many of them have been staged by the professional stage. It was so, as the sudden initial demand was met with by the adapted plays from Sanskrit. There was sufficient time and talent for creating original plays on Paurāṇic themes. After the demise of Varadachar and the dissolution of the *Ratnāvali Theatrical Company*

1. ಕವಿಜನರಲ್ಲ ನೋಡಬಹುದೆನ್ನದು ಕೃತ್ಯವನನ್ನದೇರದೊಳ್ | ವಿವಿಧ ಜನರ್ದಳಂ ವಿವಿಧ ಭಾಷೆಯೊಳಂತರಿಸಿರ್ಪವಂಗಳಂ | ಸವಿಯೊಳು ಹಚ್ಚಿ ನೋಡಲೊರೆ ಕನ್ನಡಿನನ್ನದು ಹೆಚ್ಚ ದಿದೊಡೆ | ಕವಿತೆಯ ಗಂಡುಮೆಚ್ಚು ಕರನಾಟಕ ಬಿಟ್ಟು ತೆರಳ್ದು ಪೋಗುವೆಂ—

—ಜುರಮರಿ ಶೇಷಗಿರಿರಾವ್ , ಸೂಚನೆ : — ಶಾಕುಂತಲ ನಾಟಕವು ೧೯೩೪.

2. Mudavidu Krishnarao—Introduction to the above version. 1934. p 12-13.

3. ‘Priyadarsika’ of Sri Harṣa also was translated into Kannada by Shrinivas Venkote-h Katti and was published in 1896. There, he has drawn tunes from Churamuri’s Kannada ‘*Sākuntala*’ Ex : ‘ ಹೇಳಬೇಡವೆಂ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಕೆಲಸ ’ ಎಂಬಂತೆ. It is therefore evident that Churamuri’s Kannada version of *Śākuntala* was very popular at least by 1890.

no serious attempt seems to have been made to stage Kannada versions of Sanskrit plays.

ENGLISH :

Pleased with the performance of *Shākuntala* staged by the Palace Company, the Maharāja Chāmarājendra Wodeyar expressed a desire in 1882, that the well known plays from other languages also, particularly from English, be translated into Kannada. Greatly encouraged by this, learned men like A. Anandarao, C. Subba Rao, Basavappa Shāstri and Jayarāyāchārya set themselves to translate into Kannada, the well known plays of Shakespeare. C. Subba Rao who was connected with the Royal School, translated—*Othello* and completed it with the assistance of Basavappa Shāstri who must have given final touches to the work. The translation was called *Śūrasena Charitre*. A. Ananda Rao, a Forest Settlement Officer, with the assistance of Pandit Jayarāyāchārya, translated *Romeo and Juliet* (*Rāmavarma Lelāvati Charitre*), *Merchant of Venice* (*Pāñchāli Parinaya*) and *Hamlet*. The translations, when staged by the Palace Company, came to be relished, and enthused others to translate plays from the English dramatic literature.

M. L. Srikantagowda was one of the first and foremost men to translate Shakespeare. The best known of his translations are of *Macbeth* (*Pratāpa Rudradeva*) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Pramīlārjuniya*). His attempt to place the themes in native settings met with considerable success, but it necessarily made him deviate from the original in details. He gave popular local names to the original characters and employed easy-flowing simple Kannada. Of his renderings, *Pratāpa Rudradeva* is better known and has been repeatedly staged by the *Ratnāvali Theatrical Company* of Varadachar. D. V. Gundappa's rendering of *Macbeth* does more justice to the original with its accuracy in expression and its dignified blank verse. It is hailed as giving a convincing and intimate glimpse of Shakespeare, but no professional troupe has yet attempted to stage it.

*Taming of the Shrew* has been well adapted into Kannada by K. Lakshmana Rao as *Chandi Maḍa Maḍana Nāṭaka* and also by Parvatavani as *Bahaddūr Ganda*. Both the versions seem to sustain well on the stage and the latter has been staged quite often in the Mysore area. The prominent among other renderings of English plays into Kannada is *Birugāli*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tempest* by K. V. Puttappa. Its poetical merit, beauty of expression and grandeur of imagination have made it look like an original play rather than an adaptation. Others deserving mention here are *V*

adaptation by Devudu of *Trial of Jesus* of John Masefield, *Sāvina Samasye*, a rendering of *Twice is too much*, done by Vembar Venkatacharya, *Sootrada Bombe* an effective rendering by S. G. Shastry of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Asādhabhooti* a beautiful adaptation by A. N. Moorthy Rao of Molier's *Tartuffe*. Not one of these plays was taken up by the professional stage, for, 'though they had poetical worth and literary merit, they did not have sufficient theatrical strength.' However, quite a few of them have been taken up by the amateur stage.

In North Karnatak, Gundo Krishna Churamuri seems to have been the first to have translated Shakespeare. His rendering of *Othello* as *Rāghavendraraō Nātaka* (printed in 1885) is a broad adaptation of the original rather than its true translation. His effort to put the alien theme into native settings is not fruitful, and there is no evidence of its having been staged by any professional troupe. Later, Gadigayya Hucchayya Honnapurmāth translated *Taming of the Shrew* under the title *Trātika Nātaka*. His was not a rendering from the English original but was based on the *Marathi version* by Prof. Kelkar of Poona. *Dweṣa Bhāṇḍāra* an adaptation of *Macbeth* by Harnahalli Ananthrao did not suit the professional stage. Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* named *Mohini* or *Nindakara Naḍāvali* is better known. More popular Kannada versions of Shakespeare's plays came from Kerur Vasudeva-charya whose rendering of *A Mid Summer Night's Dream* (*Vasantayāmini Swapna Chamatkāra Nataka*), *Merchant of Venice* (*Suratana-garada Śrēṣṭi*), *Romeo and Juliet* (*Ramesh-Lalita*) and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (*Pati Vashikaraṇa*) caught the attention of the reading public<sup>1</sup> rather than the theatre-goers. Evidently no professional company came forward to stage them, but every effort was made to bring them on the amateur stage by the *Vasudeva Amateurs* of Bagalkot.

This brief account would suggest that the Kannada renderings of some of the well-known English plays enriched the dramatic literature of Karnatak rather than adding anything substantial to its professional

1. ನಾಟಕದ ನೈಪುಣ್ಯವೂ ಕೂಡ ಕವಿಯ ಸದ್ಗುಣವೆಂದು ನಮ್ಮ ಭಾಗದಲ್ಲಿ ಮೊದಲು ತೋರಿಸಿಕೊಟ್ಟವರು ವೈ. ವಾಸುದೇವಾಚಾರ್ಯ ಕೆರೂರ ಅವರು. 'ಕರ್ಣಾಟಕದ ಚೈತನ್ಯವನ್ನು ಮನೋಹರವಾದ ನಾಟಕದ ರೂಪದಲ್ಲಿ ಜನರ ಕಣ್ಣು ಮುಂದಿಡುವುದರಲ್ಲಿ ಅಚಾರ್ಯರನ್ನು ಮೀರಿದವರು ಯಾರೂ ಇಲ್ಲವೆಂದು ಹೇಳಬಹುದು. ಈ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ಅವರ ಪ್ರತಿಭಾ ಸಾಮರ್ಥ್ಯವೆಷ್ಟಿದ್ದಿತೆಂಬುದಕ್ಕೆ ಅವರ 'ಪತಿವಶೀಕರಣ' ನಾಟಕವೇ ಸಾಕ್ಷಿಯಾಗಿದೆ'.

stage. The professional troupes did not take to them as enthusiastically as they took to the Kannada renderings of Sanskrit Plays. The objection was obviously to the western theme, which, though provided scope for good entertainment, did not preach morals like the ones drawn from our epics; nor did it come near the land's history, nor reflected on a social evil or a problem of immediate concern. According to available evidences, only the Palace Company and later, the Ratnāvali Company staged some of the adaptations from Shakespeare, particularly, *Rāmavarma Līlavati* ( Romeo and Juliet ) and *Sūrasena Charitre* ( Othello ). Even theirs was a bold adventure considering the standards of the time, but the plays sustained themselves on the stage, essentially owing to the histrionic brilliance of eminent artists like Certain Ramarao and A. V. Varadachar. The adaptations became popular with the Amateur stage because of the initiative of enthusiastic troupes like *The Amateur Dramatic Association* and the *Chaya Artists* of Bangalore and *The Vāsudev Amateurs* of Bagalkot.

#### MARATHI:

If the professional stage of Mysore area drew its plays from the sanskrit dramatic literature in its initial stages, the professional stage of North Karnatak drew its resources from the Marathi dramatic literature. Playwrights like Gadakari, Khadilkar, Kolhatkar and Deval with their prolific and merited contributions had placed the Marathi stage on a solid and lofty bed-rock. North Karnatak which had a closer relation with Maharashtra freely drew on the Marathi drama and translated almost every well known play into Kannada.

Gururao Raghavendra Mamadapur of Dharwar set himself at the task of translating the well known Marathi plays for the Kannada professional stage. Mudavidu Krishnarao, Garud Sadashivarao, Vamanarao Master, Subbarao Adabaddi, G. G. Hegde and L. J. Bendre, steadily drew from the Marathi dramatic literature. G. H. Veeranna got four of the most popular plays Ekach Pyāla (*Surā Mahime*), Rakshasi Mahatvakanksha (*Rāj Bhakti*), Ranadundubhi (*Karnātak Sāmrajya*), and Chatrapati Shivaji (*Swāmi Niyte*) translated into Kannada, changing them here and there to suit the Kannada stage.

Most of these adaptations became highly popular on the professional stage of North Karnatak. People who had seen the Marathi originals flocked again to witness the Kannada versions and were greatly satisfied. Kannada versions of *Rāmarājya Viyōga* and *Rakṣasi Mahatvākāṅkṣa* staged by Garud, *Yuvati Vijaya*, *Saubhad Mahānanda* and *Indira* staged by Shirahatti Venkobarao, *Shahc*

*vaji*, *Chatrapati Janma* and *Tippu Sultān* staged by the Halgeri Company, *Simhacha Chhava*, *Draupadi Vastraharan*, *Vidyāharan*, *Mahānanda*, *Sant Sakhubai*, *Bājirao Peshwe*, *Samśaya Kallol*, *Bhakta Prahlād* and others staged by Vamanarao Master, *Pānigrahana* staged by Sarvōdaya Nāṭya Sangha and *Pantachi Sūn* staged by Ambā Prasādita Nāṭaka Mandali—remained popular on the professional stage for many years.

An achieved magnificence of the Marathi theatre is its stage music, and, Karnatak went into raptures over it. North Karnatak accepted the Marathi stage-song as a model to copy. Vamanarao's troupe became well known for its stage songs built on the Marathi model. A. V. Varadachar deputed his talented musicians like Seshagirirao to Poona and Bombay to learn the tunes of Marathi stage music for the benefit of Mysore audiences.

#### TELUGU :

After coming into being in the late eighties of the last century, the professional theatre of Andhra steadily built up its dramatic literature on account of the writings of eminent playwrights like D. Krishnamacharlu, D. Gopalacharlu, Gurujada Apparao, Kundkur Veeresha Lingam Pantulu, Vaddadi Subbarayalu and Vedam Venkataraya Sastri. Some of their representative plays, particularly of Veeresha Lingam Pantulu were translated into Kannada by Nanjangud Śrikanta Śāstri. He translated about twenty plays from Telugu. Prominent among them are *Bāla Bhāryā Vriddha Bharṭṛ Prahāsana*, *Mahābadhira Prahāsana*, *Moodha Bhāryā Chatura Bharṭṛ Prahāsana* and *Vismaya Vivāha*. Kandāde Krishna Iyengar's rendering of *Kanyā Śulka* has been popular on the stage in Mysore. Jayarāyāchārya also rendered *Mahābadhira Prahāsana* into Kannada. Benagal Ramarao and V. B. Ishwararao translated *Kalahapriya Prahāsana* and *Tishya Rakshata* respectively. With its grand conception and brilliant exposition, the play *Bhadrāchala Ramadās* written by D. Gopalacharlu became highly popular when staged by the Amateur Dramatic Association of Bangalore with Pandit Taranath and T. Raghavachari in leading roles. The Kannada rendering of *Kanyā Śulka* with its topical theme went well on both the professional and the amateur stage.

#### BENGALI :

During the last hundred and fifty years, Bengal built up such a merited dramatic literature that it is commonly said that

“the value of the Bengali drama would not in any sense be

diminished had everything that was written before 1800 completely perished.”<sup>1</sup>

New plays were contributed by scores of playwrights, the prominent of whom were Michael Madhusudhana Dutt, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Dinbandhu Mitra, Dwijendralal Roy and Tagore. The plays with their amazing vitality held the stage with a glory of their own for years, and many of them were translated into other languages. Unfortunately, Karnatak did not draw a justifiable number of plays from the rich Bengali dramatic literature.

C. K. Venkataramayya made an able rendering into Kannada of the famed *Tapobala* of Girish Chandra Ghosh. The tragic theme of *Krishna Kumāri* of Michael Madhusudhana Dutt inspired Kannada writers particularly Cha Vasudevayya in his *Aryakeerti* and M. N. Kamath in his *Kṣātra Teja*. Two plays of D. L. Roy, *Seeta* and *Bhishma* were rendered into Kannada by D. K. Bharadwaj. Three other well known plays of Dwijendralal Roy—*Mevād Patana*, *Shahājahān* and *Chandragupta* were translated into Kannada by G. L. Halleppannavar, B. Puttaswamiah and M. N. Choudappa respectively. Of these, *Mevāḍa Patana* has been on the professional stage of North Karnatak, while *Shāhājhān* and *Chandragupta* on the professional stage of Mysore. Of these, again, *Shahajahān* held the stage with great appeal and drew crowded houses on continuous evenings when it was staged by the Chandrakala Nataka Mandali of Mohmad Peer. The great success was due both to the theatrical strength and beauty of the play, and to the outstanding histrionic abilities of Peer.

The professional theatre of Karnatak thus tried to draw its themes and plays from the Marathi, Bengali and Telugu dramatic literatures in addition to the inevitable Sanskrit and English literatures. The North Karnatak stage is obliged more to the Marathi dramatic literature, while the Mysore stage, comparatively, has slightly more of originally written plays in Kannada. It is strange, however, that Karnatak has drawn themes from the dramatic literatures of the neighbouring regions without giving some of its own stage plays to others. This cannot imply a poverty of original Kannada plays for, there is many a play of considerable merit and theatrical strength, deserving to be translated into other languages. *Sharaṇa Basava* and *Ecchamanayaka* of Garuda, *Baḍatanada Bhūta* of Kandgal, *Shikṣaṇa Sambhrama* of N. K. Huilgol, *Mandōḍari* and *Nachikēta* of C. K. Venkataramiah,

1. Prof. Sukumar Dutt : *Modern Bengali Stage : Theatre* ; 1-2, Aug ; 1931. p. 135.

*Samsāra Nauka* of H. L. N. Simha, *Devadāsi* of K. Hirannayya, *Akka Mahadevi* of B. Puttaswamiah and *Dharma Ratnākara* of Hunsur Krishnamurthi are a few among such brilliant stage plays that Karnatak could well be proud of, and which, richly deserve to be translated into other languages.

#### THE ACTOR :

It is the actor that fills life into the words of cold print and gives them a meaning and power in order to bring the mental picture of the playwright to the visual plane. He is in fact the interpreter of the playwright. There are instances of the genius of the actor which turned a dull script into a potent performance. It is natural therefore, for the stage to depend for its success, on the abilities of its artist in no less a measure than on the creative genius of its playwright. Like the eminent playwright, the intelligent and talented artist has found his place in the pages of the dramatic history of any region or country. The theatrical history of Bengal cannot but pause and reflect on the magnificent abilities of great actors like Girish Chandra Ghosh, Sisir Kumar Bhaduri or Nirmalendu Lahiri and that of Maharashtra,—of the great Ganapatrao Joshi, Keshavarao Date or Bal Gandharva. Karnatak too discovered scores of actors of great talent who left an indelible impression on their spectators. They, in fact, gave a glamour to the stage.

Nay, it is not the question of merely adding glory to the stage. It may even be said that the Kannada professional theatre is essentially a making of the actor, for, unlike the folk theatre or the amateur stage, it is around a professional *actor* that a troupe usually revolved and a play sustained itself. In Karnatak, it is a talented actor who founded a troupe and ran it. Many a professional troupe went defunct immediately after the death of an actor like Peer or Handignur and many an acclaimed play like *Śākuntala* or *Deenabandhu Kabir* lost all its power and attraction after the death of an actor like Varadachar or Raghavachari. It is the artist ultimately, who takes any play into success. In the hands of a bad artist even a good play becomes dull, but in the hands of a good artist even a bad play has every chance of becoming impressive. The actor, thus, is the very spine of theatrical strength.

#### VARADACHAR :

Karnatak found many an actor and actress of rare talent and ability. Even from within the abyss of squalid circumstances and poverty, the talented ones rose to heights with a mastery in the digni-

fied 'character-acting' or the all-pervading comic type. A few of them who were the architects of the Kannada Stage set standards in theatrical artistry, and among them, A. V. Varadachar was surely one.

N. S. Subbarao, the then Vice-Chancellor of the Mysore University, presiding over a Drama Conference in 1930, appealed to the stage-artists of the day *not to imitate* Varadachar, as it would do no justice to the role, the actor himself and to Varadachar.<sup>1</sup> To imitate the inimitable Varadachar was hazardous, and yet, it had become a contagious fashion. Varadachar was truly a symbol of the best talent of the professional stage of Mysore which he ruled for a quarter of a century from about 1900 A. D.

Gifted with a grand personality and a magnificent voice, Varadachar had acquired a thorough knowledge of the Kannada classics and Karnatak classical music.<sup>2</sup> More than his several contributions to the Kannada professional stage, like a new stage music, the sound pit, stage-illumination, rationalised make-up and rational costumes and settings, it is his capacity to *live* the role that brought him all the glory. His portrayal of roles like *Hiranyakashipu* (in *Prahlāda*), *Santāpaka* (in *Nirupama*), *Vasanta* (in *Ratnāvali*) and *Rāmavarma* (in *Rāmavarma Līlāvali*) made both Varadachar and the roles famous all over South India.

"In Hiranyakashipu he portrayed a subtle inter-play of pride and pity, love and hatred, agony and conflict....he tried to humanise a *Rākshasa* character into a gorgeous object of impotent wrath fighting and foundering on the rock of an inexorable law....

His Rama Varma was a moving epic study in tragedy."<sup>3</sup>

He gave these roles a magic touch—all his own, that made them glorious. In the role of Hiranyakashipu, he impressed as the monarch who had scattered away the *Devas* and lived the real Lord of the world; yet he gave a delightful human touch to the role in the Dream Scene when he lovingly entreated the young prahlāda to respect his words, and then again, in the last scene, when the uncontrollable obstinate fury gave way to utter bewilderment as the Lord Narasimha came out shattering the huge column, he expressed every shade of the emotion

1. *Kalā* I. 3. May 1930. p. 94.

2. ರಂಗಮಂಟಪವನ್ನು ಪ್ರವೇಶಿಸಿದವರ ಹೈಕಿ ಇವರಷ್ಟು ರಾಜಭಾಷೆಯನ್ನು ವ್ಯಾಸಂಗ ಮಾಡಿ ಗ್ರಂಥಗಳಿಂದ ವಿಚಾರ ಸಂಗ್ರಹಿಸಿದವರು ಯಾರೂ ಇಲ್ಲ.

N. G. Subrahmanya Shastri—*Jeevana*. March, 1959.

3. V. Bhaskaran. *A. V. Varadachar Actor and Artist. Theatre*. March, 1931. p. 36.

befitting the dignified monarch of the Earth and Heavens. The climax came when, before meeting his own *Karma* that came to devour him, he paused, took a loving look and grabbed his little son to his bosom to press a grateful kiss on his forehead. Though in the raptures of a devotee who had long awaited to see the God of gods, he then turned towards his pronounced enemy. Varadachar's mastery at portraying mixed emotions made his audience never forget him as a genius in dramatic art. He gave the same touch of originality to every role he portrayed.

"Neither bound by narrow tradition nor by the rigid scholasticism of Pauranic plots, Varadachar flew easily with outstretched wings in the realms of deepest human tragedy and presented a Romeo of the finest type to the audience. In the love of Dushyanta he was love incarnate; his *Keechaka* was the very epitome of love gone crazy and mad."<sup>2</sup>

His deep-set rolling eyes are said to have portrayed feelings more vividly than even his matchless voice and acting could do. He appeared to reach his best in his 'inimitable delineation and display of *Sringāra*, which earned him the reputation of being the greatest romantic hero of the South Indian stage.

In an intimate pen-picture of the acting abilities of Varadachar, V. Sitaramiah pays a compliment to the very manner in which he entered the stage and retired from it, in different scenes, for, the very entrance portrayed the innate emotion of the character.<sup>3</sup> The way he danced into the stage with a deliberate agility—soft and delicate, looking hither and thither, taking a leap and pausing a while, as Dushyanta chasing the deer, always brought him spontaneous ovations. In the play *Ratnāvali*, on the occasion of the Spring Festival (*Vasantōtsava*) the solemn dignity of his entrance infused a serene atmosphere into the entire setting. In *Harischandra*, his entrance from the rear wing of the darkish stage into the burial ground, as the heavy-hearted but determined Harischandra, with his deep dark shadow steadily growing on the hind screen as he slowly advanced on the stage towards the foot lights

1. "ಬಸವಪ್ರಶಸ್ತಿಗಳು ಶಾಕುಂತಲವನ್ನು ಕನ್ನಡಕ್ಕೆ ತಂದು ವಿಖ್ಯಾತಮಾಡಿದರೆ, ವರದಾ ಜಾರ್ಯರು ತಮ್ಮ ನಟನಪ್ರಭಾವದಿಂದ ದುಷ್ಯಂತನನ್ನು ಅಜರಾಮರವಾಗಿ ಮಾಡಿದರು." ಎಂ. ಜಿ. ಸುಬ್ರಹ್ಮಣ್ಯಶಾಸ್ತ್ರಿ

2. V. Bhaskaran: Op. cit. p. 36

3. "ಆಚಾರ್ಯರು ರಂಗಪ್ರವೇಶ ಮಾಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾಗ, ನಿಷ್ಕ್ರಮಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾಗ ಇದುವರೆಗೆ ಯಾರ ಪ್ರವೇಶ ನಿಷ್ಕ್ರಾಂತಗಳನ್ನೂ ನಾವು ನೋಡಿಲ್ಲ".

ಎ. ಸೀತಾರಾಮಯ್ಯ—'ಆಚಾರ್ಯರ ಅಭಿನಯಕಲೆ'—ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ, ಮಾರ್ಚ್-೧೯೩೧ ಪುಟ ೧೪೬

was a calculated achievement in showmanship. Varadachar represented a rare combination of acting and showmanship by LIVING a role and creating a natural atmosphere on the stage.

“ His performances gave a new vision to the spectator and taught him a new taste with which he could distinguish the worthy from the unworthy in theatrical art. ” <sup>1</sup>

‘It was not merely the fine art of acting that earned such unstinted and superlative praise for Varadachar. Nature had blessed him with a voice, which, for its depth and volume, its timbre and melody was hard to excel.’ This God-given gift, he made use of for the best advantage of the stage. With a skill which bore a stamp of genius, he evolved a new tradition in stage music. In music and acting, he was a rigorous trainer of himself and every individual in his troupe. Every movement on the stage was calculated with a deep understanding of the role and when the song came, it came only in exquisite harmony with the emotion and environment.

“ His sublimated music made Varadachar’s art so entrancing. He showed the *Navarasas* in delightful profusion, and his music bathed the play in rare melody of delicious charm and grace. ”

But the stage was only nature’s compensation to Varadachar ‘a man of many disappointments’.<sup>2</sup> He was hit hard by domestic calamities. Death snatched away his parents when he was quite young; his wife and the only child died when he was in the prime of youth, and his supporting brother, Shamanna, an eminent actor himself, passed away when he was most needed to run the flourishing troupe. Varadachar remained all alone but not all for himself. He dedicated himself, his art and all his possessions to the society, only too ungrudgingly. His generosity became proverbial and earned him praise from C. R. Reddy as ‘ the most princely benefactor among the Mysore public ’. He said ‘nay’ to none and facts regarding his generosity looked like fiction. Like a loving father of a family, he stood by his troupe, concerned in each individual’s pleasure and pain, and lived as a worthy example both on the stage and in life. All through his career, society was bountiful both in its praise and patronage to him. Yet, strange are its ways, for, it left him to die, in 1926, in despair and distress—, in poverty and neglect. He left an ever green memory of himself in his spectators but not a tangible legacy.

“ For one thing, his example was too high to be easily emulated

1. V. Sitaramiah—*Ibid.*

2. M. A. Gopalswami Iyengar—*A. V. Varadachar : A Sketch*—1926. P. 1.

by common people. . . . there was absolutely no question of imitating his transcendental art which blossomed and danced only to a symphony of its supreme master and the ecstatic urge of his soaring intellect. At best Varadachar's bequest could be a sweeping gesture—from the serene heights to the half-gods below."<sup>1</sup>

Yet his memory worked the miracle and 'the Varadachar school of acting' attracted every ambitious actor of the Mysore Stage, and imprinted its stamp on the performances of eminent artists like T. Raghavachari, R. Nagendrarao and Mohamed Peer.

SADASIVARAO GARUD:

Very similar, if not the same tradition in acting was set on the professional stage of Karnatak by Garud Sadasivarao, a junior contemporary of Varadachar. He trained scores of young men in the theory and practice of stage-acting and the Garud School is an achieved reality, for, almost every known actor in North Karnatak seems to have drawn his inspiration, if not direct training, from Garud. To Garud, the art of acting was a methodical science, which could be reasoned out and taught. He believed that an actor was not *born* but *made* with a systematic training and practice. 'Those that desire to make others feel an emotion must first feel it themselves' was the basis of Garud's success on the stage. He practiced what he preached.<sup>2</sup> Garud's method was a planned portrayal rather than a spontaneous performance and he had trained himself in the *Trishya* and *Chaturashra* types of acting in the portrayal of mixed emotions,<sup>3</sup> and employed them at command, particularly in the roles of Dasharatha, Echama Nāyaka, Kabirdās and Ashoka. Garud was perhaps the first actor in Karnatak to have analysed and rationalised the art of acting. Almost every play of his created sufficient scope for the 'study in contrasts', thereby providing equal scope for the full expression of the actor's talent. An artist who came

1 V. Bhaskarn. Ibid. p. 40.

2. He insisted on one's own **FEELING** the emotion—he tried to portray. It is said that while rehearsing an artist of his troupe for the role of *Yechamma Nayaka*, Garud insisted that the artist should **FEEL** thrilled when he said 'I am thrilled'. The feeling was to be physically shown by making the hair stand on end. The actor could not do it, but Garud demonstrated the feeling every time he rehearsed the words 'I am thrilled'. (Collected from Pandit C. Y. Kavali; MSS).

3 The *Trishya* type is then method of bringing into play, the passing expressions of two different types of feelings over and above the static expression of a basic mood—all, simultaneously. The *Chaturashra* type presented three different types of passing feelings, brought to play on the static expression of a basic mood.

out with success from the vigorous methods of training and meticulous tests of Garud was certain of making a name, for he would always be on demand by different professional troupes.

As important as the facial expression was an intelligent use of voice and a calculated articulation. Garud's own troupe which earned a reputation for impressive *abhinaya* paid a great deal of attention to the best use of the voice unlike many an other troupe which 'shouted out the play.' In the role of the aged Dasharatha—crushed with the shock of the departure of Rama,—Garud put his voice into a memorable use when he moaned the name of Rama twice or thrice with short pauses in between—completely altering the tone and the pitch of his voice. Equally grand was his playing the role of Ashoka (in the play *Vishama Vivāha*), particularly while portraying the emotions of the great monarch who suffered a shock on realising the wickedness of his wily queen. Like Varadachar, he often appeared in minor roles also to make a magnificence of the insignificant. The country recognized his art, his patriotism and his great efforts to stage the theatre of North Karnatak and honoured him with the title *Karnataka Natakālankāra* at the Belgaum Kannada Conference in 1925.

#### RAGHAVACHARI :

T. Raghavachari's bearing and dignity in acting made his performances memorable. It is said that when once Varadachar was asked as to why he did not choose to portray Shakespearean tragic roles as he did the romantic ones like "Romeo", Varadachar remarked—"What I to play Hamlet and Othello? Who could compare with Raghavachari in those roles? If Irving saw him playing Hamlet, even he would say the same".<sup>1</sup> Those who saw Raghavachari on the stage would not think that this was an undeserved compliment, for, he was an actor of consummate skill in portraying intense emotions. Gifted with a grand personality and a charming face with chiselled features that could ably express the serious and sublime, rather than the light and humorous, Raghavachari could well be compared with Ganapatrao Joshi of Maharastra or Sisir Bahaduri of Bengal. Like Certain Ramarao of the Palace Company, Raghavachari also, with ceaseless effort and an insight, gained mastery in portraying the epic characters of Shakespeare, particularly those of Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet and Shylock, and earned appreciation from the western critics resident in

1. A. N. Krishnarao : *Haleya Nenahu : Rangabhoomi*, May, 1930. p. 177.

India.<sup>1</sup> Though he was an outstanding representative of the *amateur stage* of Karnatak and Andhra, his talent and achievement compared favourably with that of the best of the professional artists.<sup>2</sup>

Raghavachari had a 'stage personality', a good mastery of voice and was equipped with high academic education in literature and law. This served a double purpose by adding 'a culture' to 'his performance and creating a favourable feeling in the people towards the stage, be it amateur or professional. Raghavachari came to be known for his brilliant interpretation of epic characters. He was at his best in mythological roles, of Hariśchandra, Daśaratha, Rāvana Chānākya, Ramadās and Kabīr. The author felt honoured if Raghavachari took up his plays.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary artists like Sthānam Narasimharao of Andhra were convinced that "he was inimitable in the great epic characters."<sup>4</sup> Raghavachari's 'living the roles' of Ramadās and Kabirdās convinced his admirers of the legend that he was born of divine grace with the blessings of one, *Avadhoota Basappa*. To them he was more than a mortal.<sup>5</sup> And to him, the stage was a sacred temple and drama, a mode of worship. This gave a holy touch to his art and earned him friends and admirers.<sup>6</sup> His bearing and 'gait' on the stage,

1. Principal J. G. Tait, a Professor of English in the Mysore University and a well known critic admired Raghavachari's talents and appreciated his 'Shylock', saying that "he portrayed it much better than some of the well known English actors".—C. K. Venkataramiah: *Stage Centenary Vol. II*, p. 76-77.

2. "ರಾಘವಾಚಾರ್ಯರು ಧ್ವನಿಯನ್ನು ಬದಲಾಯಿಸುವುದರಲ್ಲಿ ವಿಶ್ವಕರ್ಮ. ವರದಾಚಾರ್ಯರು ತೂಕವಾದ ಮುದ್ದೆಭಾವಗಳನ್ನು ತೋರಿಸುವುದರಲ್ಲಿ ಅದ್ವಿತೀಯ. ಇದುವರೆಗೆ ಈ ಇಬ್ಬರು ಮಹನೀಯರನ್ನು ಅನುಕರಿಸುವವರು ಹುಟ್ಟಿಲ್ಲ.

ದೇವುಡು—ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯಜ್ಞರ ಆತ್ಮಕಥನ ೧೯೪೩ ಪುಟ ೩೪

3 C. K. Venkataramiah: *Sāhityajñana Ātmakathana*— p. 65

4. "ಅಂಥ ಸೀಮೆಯ ಸುಪ್ರಸಿದ್ಧ ನಟರಲ್ಲೊಬ್ಬರಾದ ಶ್ರೀಮಾನ್ ಸ್ಥಾನಂ ನರಸಿಂಹರಾಯರವರು ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿಗೆ ಬಂದಾಗ ತಮ್ಮ ನಾಟಕ ಸಂಘದಲ್ಲಿ 'ಮಂಜೋದರಿ' ನಾಟಕವನ್ನು ಅಭಿನಯಿಸಬೇಕೆಂದು ಉದ್ದೇಶಿಸಿದ್ದರು, ಆದರೆ ಶ್ರೀಮಾನ್ ಪಾಡಾಪತ್ರಿ ರಾಘವಾಚಾರ್ಯರು ರಾವಣನ ಪಾತ್ರವನ್ನು ಧರಿಸಿ ಪ್ರದರ್ಶಿಸಿದ ಅಭಿನಯ ಕಾಶಲೃವನ್ನು ಕಂಡು ಬೆರಗಾಗಿ "ನಾನು ಮಂಜೋದರಿ ಪಾತ್ರವನ್ನೇನೋ ಹೇಗೋ ಅಭಿನಯಿಸೇನು ಅದರೆ ಅಂಥ ರಾವಣನನ್ನೆಲ್ಲಿ ತರಲಿ ?" ಎಂದು ಶಾತ್ವರ್ಯವಾಗುವಂತೆ ತೆಲಗಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಹೇಳಿ ತಮ್ಮ ಉದ್ದೇಶವನ್ನು ಕೈಬಿಟ್ಟರು." ಸಿ. ಕೆ. ವೆಂಕಟರಾಮಯ್ಯ— (ಅದೇ ಪುಟ)

5. Ramesh—*Natyajeevi—Kalā* Bellary, 1951. P. XVI.

6 T. Raghavachari's letter to the late C Ananda Rao, a senior amateur actor of Mysore throws some light on this aspect. He wrote: "Do not seek for the applause of the 'Gods' and you are applauded. Do not seek for success and you succeed. . . . The stage is meant to contribute to the happiness of the world; and we can never feel happy nor make others happy until we

(Contd.)

his impressive portrayal of roles with a rare understanding convinced his spectators that he was a prodigy in acting.

Raghavachari lived as the soul and spirit of the *Sarasa Vinodini Sabhâ* of Bellary and also the *Amateur Dramatic Association* of Bangalore. The rigorous training he gave and the attention he paid to details of production made the plays attractive. His troupe staged plays in Kannada, Telugu, and English. Raghavachari's performances of *Deenabandhu Kabir*, a stage play written by Pandit Taranath, *Ramadâs* by D. Gopalacharlu, *Prahlâda* by Rajakavi Srinivasa Iyengar, *Chitrâ* of Tagore and *Othello* became widely known, and he led the A. D. A. troupe on a two months trip to Bombay, Simla and Calcutta in the year 1931. His success made an impression for the first time, on other regions of India, and gave them a glimpse of the theatrical art of Karnataka. Mahatma Gandhi, while in Bangalore, witnessed the performances of *Deenabandhu Kabir* and also *Samâja*, a social play on the problem of untouchability, and said, "of the impressions I carry of Karnatak, this will be one of those that will never be forgotten."<sup>1</sup>

While in the west in 1928 to study the advancement of the theatre-arts there for the benefit of the Indian stage, Raghavachari was honoured as a representative of the Indian theatre by the well known Garric Club of London. The party arranged in his honour was attended by eminent British artists like Sir Forbs Robertson, Mr. and Mrs. Norman Forbs Robertson and dignitaries like Winston Churchill. Raghavachari also had an intimate interview with Bernard Shaw. The English Press greatly admired him for his approaching the International Theatre Society in order to bring about an exchange of theatrical troupes between England and her overseas colonies on periodical tours.<sup>2</sup> After his return from the west, Raghavachari continued his service to the Kannada stage and later, was honoured by his countrymen with the title *Nâtya Kalâ Prapoorna*.

The British Government honoured him with the title *Rao Bahadur*. Like Varadachar, Raghavachari also wrote stage plays in the last years

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keep the 'I' in us far away from the foot lights. . . . Never look for individual appreciation, nor strive to imitate any one however great he may be ! Lose your self in HIM the Chief Actor : I always pray before I go on the stage.' (A letter dated 11th January, 1922, MSS.).

1. Rangabhoomi II.—11 pp. 165-166.

2. J. T. Green, a correspondent of Illustrated London News wrote in his paper about Raghavachari. "A fascinating personality, a fine speaker, is sure to enlist interest for a new movement which is one of far reaching importance for the better understanding of Motherland and its allied empire beyond the seas."—*Rangabhoomi*—Oct. 1923, p. 32.

of his career, and staged them with success.<sup>1</sup> Raghavachari passed away in 1946 ( April ) at the age of 66.

#### MOHAMED PEER :

Mohamed Peer was from the same classical mould and he came on the scene—for a short but brilliant time, when the shades of night were falling on the dramatic world of Karnatak. As a determined youth, he ' bore amid snow and ice ' a banner excelsior of the salient aspects of the Kannada theatrical art. Within a short span of a decade from 1925 he made his mark as an actor of outstanding ability, especially in portraying serious and dignified classical roles. Though a Muslim, he spoke the very pure Kannada, the blank verse and even the classical, with an ease and effect; but more than this, it is his potential talent that attracted the critic, the learned and the layman alike.

After playing minor roles in *Srikanta Vilāsa Karnātak Nātak Sabhā* of Nata Bhayankara M. N. Gangadhararao, and also in *Lalita Kalā Mandali* of N. Subbanna, Peer started his own troupe in 1930. But by then, he had earned a reputation for playing the role of ' Vijaya ' in the play *Krishna Leela*. With a distinct devotional implication, Peer " resurrected the role of Vijaya from the deplorable abyss into which Shirahatti Venkobarao's performances had put him, and made him again an innocent and devoted companion of Krishna ".<sup>2</sup> The parting scene when Krishna left Brindāvan on the invitation of Kamsa, provided a great scope to Peer to display his talent. Peer as Vijaya would stand still at a corner of the stage for scores of minutes all too silently with bent head and wet eyes, until Krishna bade farewell to all and turned to him. Krishna would then move to him with a heavy gait, would slowly lift his face by the chin—with a look into the eyes, and then they would fall into the arms of each other—all too silently but all too eloquently. Peer created new worlds for his spectators and always collected the toll of their tears. Surely, as Dāra in *Shahajahan*, Sundara in *Samsara Nauka* or even as Gautama in *Gautama Buddha*, Peer moved his audiences to tears.

Peer did not stage mythological plays, nor did he have spectacular sceneries or settings; his plays did not lay any emphasis on the stage-music and yet, he toured the entire length and breadth of Karnatak,

1. *Saripadanisangatulu* and *Telugani Samasya* are the two plays—both in Telugu.
2. A. N. Krishnarao; *Karnatakada Kalāvidaru* I. P. 97. In the play *Krishna Leela* staged by Shirahatti Venkobarao, Vijaya was depicted as a " help-ful go-between for Krishna's romantic life. "

creating a new taste for prose plays. His only assets were the plays themselves and a talented troupe of artists including H. L. N. Simha, H. Ramachandra Shastri and M. V. Rajamma. As Dāra in *Shahajahan*, he intensified the effect of the tragedy with an ineffaceable smile of dignity as a reply to all the meanness of the imperious Aurangazeb. As Sundara in *Samsara Nauka*, he depicted a helpless victim of parental wrath, social inequality and of the eating poverty, in a manner that it became perhaps THE most effective of social plays on the professional stage of Mysore. The golden climax to his fame was provided by *Gautama Buddha*, in which he played the hero with an effect that touched the heart of his spectator.<sup>1</sup> With his brilliant performances Peer created a respect for the Mysore stage in other parts of Karnatak.<sup>2</sup> With the untimely death of Peer in 1937, the three plays also died out of the stage.

Peer died in the prime of his youth and success, to bring the curtain down on the golden age of the professional stage which had started with A. V. Varadachar early in the 20th century. The period of 40 years saw a galaxy of great artists and playwrights. His death marked also the end of a great tradition of 'classical' drama and left the field free for the humorous light plays. In a way, his death became symbolic of the death of all the original pomp and power of the professional theatre and the forties of this century accepted the symbolic prophesy.

#### HANDIGANUR SIDDHARAMAPPA :

A 'tragic hero' of North Karnatak who closely resembled Peer both on the stage and in real life was Siddharamappa of Handiganur (Bijapur District). Within a short span of a decade from about 1935 to 1945 he came to the forefront as an actor of rare talent, and created a place for himself among the noteworthy artists of Karnatak. He came to be reckoned with the classical mould of acting and showman-

1. ಸೀರರ ಮಾತುಗಾರಿಕೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಕವಿಯ ಅನಕುಂಠಿತ ಅಂತರಂಗದ ಭಾವನಾತರಂಗಗಳು ಎದ್ದು ಎದ್ದು ಕಾಣುತ್ತವೆ. ಮುಖಭಾವ ದೇಹಭಂಗಿಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಪಾತ್ರದ ತಾದಾತ್ಮ್ಯತೆ ಇದೆ. ಪಾತ್ರಕ್ಕೂ ನಟನಿಗೂ ಇಂತಹ ಮಧುರ ಮೈತ್ರಿ. ಕೂಡುವುದು ಬಹಳ ಅಪೂರ್ವ.

ಅ. ನ. ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾಯರು : ನಾಟಕ ವಿಮರ್ಶೆ-ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ಕಲಾವಿದರು ೧ ಪುಟ ೯೮

2. ಮೈಸೂರು ನಾಟಕ ಮಂಡಳಿಗಳ ವಿಚಾರದಲ್ಲಿ ಉತ್ತರ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿಯೂ ಉತ್ತಮ ವರ್ಗದ ಪ್ರೇಕ್ಷಕರಲ್ಲಿದ್ದ ತುಚ್ಛಭಾವನೆ ಪರಿಹಾರವಾಗಿ ಅಸಕ್ತಿ ಅಭಿಮಾನ ದುಟ್ಟಲು ಸೀರರು ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯನ್ನೇಲೆ ಪ್ರಯೋಗಿಸಿದ ನಾಟಕಗಳು ಪ್ರಚೋದಕವಾದವು.

ಬಿ. ಪುಟ್ಟಸ್ವಾಮಯ್ಯ—ನಾಟ್ಯರಂಗ ಚಿತ್ರರಂಗ—೧೯೪೮ ಪುಟ ೪

ship.<sup>1</sup> Though destined to a short life, his career was obviously as glittering as that of Peer, for, he filled the stage literally with his towering personality, royal demeanour and resounding voice. He specialised in interpreting lofty mythological characters like Krishna ( in the play, *Akṣayāmbara* ), Bāṇāsura ( in *Ushā Swayamvara* ), Harischandra and Bhīṣma. These roles came to be associated with his name, and even prompted the critic to hit a note of exaggeration saying that he stood alone without equals in portraying such lofty characters.<sup>2</sup> It must be reckoned with, however, that he did show the same genius of Varadachar in entering into the very soul of the role he was playing, and besides, he was also capable of portraying roles of very different types with equal success.

Even as a boy, Handiganur was attracted to the stage. He took to it with a great steadfastness and stuck to it even in the darkest and disillusioning circumstances. He started his stage career at the age of ten, playing female roles and made a name because of the rare naturalness of acting and a resonant musical voice. He worked with different professional troupes for about twenty years before starting his own troupe by name *Vishvakalā Ranjana Nataka Samsthe* in the year 1938-39. Though with scanty stage equipment, his troupe thrived for about eight years and earned a very good name but it failed to earn good money. The entire attraction for the public was Siddharamappa himself. His thunderous voice,<sup>3</sup> calculated emphasis on words and a becoming gait made his portrayal of Bāṇāsura<sup>4</sup> and Ravana—a household word

1. “ ಸಿದ್ಧರಾಮಪ್ಪನವರು ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕ ಕಲೆಗೆ ಅಸ್ತಿಭಾರ ಹಾಕಿದ ಮಹಾ ನಟರ ವರ್ಗಕ್ಕೆ ಸೇರಿದವರು. ಎ. ವಿ. ವರದಾಚಾರ್ಯ, ಮದಮ್ಮದ್ ಪೀರ್, ರಂಗನಾಥಭಟ್ಟ, ಸದಾಶಿವ ಗುರುಡ ಇವರ ಮಟ್ಟದಲ್ಲಿ ನಿಲ್ಲುವ ಪ್ರತಿಭೆ ಸಿದ್ಧರಾಮಪ್ಪನವರದು. ”

ಅ. ನ. ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾವ್— ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಕಲಾವಿದರು II ಪುಟ ೧೯೬.

2. ಸಿದ್ಧರಾಮಪ್ಪನವರಿಗೆ ಕೀರ್ತಿ ತಂದ ಪಾತ್ರಗಳು ಬಾಣಾಸುರ, ಕೃಷ್ಣ, ಭೀಷ್ಮ ಮತ್ತು ಹರಿಶ್ಚಂದ್ರ ಈ ನಾಲ್ಕು ಪಾತ್ರಗಳನ್ನು ಅವರು ನಿರ್ವಹಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ರೀತಿ— ‘ ನ ಭೂತೋ ನ ಭವಿಷ್ಯತಿ ’.

ಅ. ನ. ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾವ್— ( ಅದೇ ) ಪುಟ ೧೯೪.

3. ಸಿದ್ಧರಾಮಪ್ಪನವರ ದೈವದತ್ತ ಗುಣವೆಂದರೆ ಅವರ ಧ್ವನಿ. ಅದರ ಸ್ಪಷ್ಟೋಕ್ತಿ ಸ್ವಾಮ್ಯ ಅವರದಾಗಿತ್ತು. ಮಾತುಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ರಸ ತುಂಬುವ ರಹಸ್ಯ, ಭಾವಕ್ಕೆ ನುಗ್ಗುಣವಾಗಿ ಧ್ವನಿಯನ್ನು ಏರಿಸಿ ಇಳಿಸುವ ಕಲೆ, ರಸವನ್ನು ಶಿಲ್ಪದಂತೆ ಕಡೆದು ಅದನ್ನು ಚಿರವಿಮೂಲವಾಗಿ ಮಾಡುವ ಪ್ರತಿಭೆ ಅವರ ರಕ್ತಗತವಾಗಿತ್ತು.

ಅ. ನ. ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾವ್, ( ಅದೇ ) ಪುಟ ೧೯೭.

4. ಬಾಣಾಸುರನ ಪಾತ್ರವನ್ನು ವಹಿಸಿ ಬಂದು ನಿಂತರೆ ಭೈರವ ಮೂರ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಕಂಡಂತಾಗುತ್ತಿತ್ತು. ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಅವರು ರಾಧರಸದ ಪ್ರತಿಕ್ರಿಯೆ— ಸಿದ್ಧಲಿನಂತೆ ಗುಡುಗುವ ಅವರ ಕಡಲ ವಾಣಿಯನ್ನು ಕೇಳಿದಾಗ ಮುಂದಿರುವ ಪಾತ್ರದ ಜಂಘಾಬಲವೇ ಉಡುಗಿ ಹೋಗಬೇಕು.

ಬಿ. ಟಿ. ಸಾಸನೂರ— ‘ ದಿನಗತ ಹಂಸಿಗನೂರ ಸಿದ್ಧರಾಮಪ್ಪನವರು’

ವಾಕ್ಚಿತ್ರ— ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು— ನವೆಂಬರ್ ೧೯೪೭ ಪುಟ ೬೪-೬೬.

in North Karnatak. The role of Krishna in *Akshayāmbara* provided considerable scope for his talent. He gave an individual touch to the complex character of the scheming Krishna “who realised his own desire by bringing about a war between the Kauravas and Pandavas though always pretending to be interested in establishing an understanding between them.”

Later, Handignur is said to have been at his climax in the role of Bhīṣma<sup>1</sup> in the play *Uttara Bhoopa* and that of Karna in the play *Draupadi*. In the former, he portrayed the internal conflict of Bhīṣma and virtually recreated him, in all his ripe glory. His Karna is also widely remembered for the magnificent impression it created. When Karna went up and was about to shoot the *matsya* to win for himself the Princess Draupadi, she despised him on the plea that he was a low-born *Soota*. This situation was made memorable by Handignur who gave a bit of his brilliant acting by fixing up his eyes at the top lights and delivering his effective soliloquy of Karna, cursing his fate. He would then drop a tear or two from his wide open eyes which would draw their likes from the thousand others that saw the master-actor.

Handignur, like the later well known actor Madhvaraja Umarji<sup>2</sup> held out great hopes for the Karnatak stage, but died all too suddenly in 1947 rendering a great loss to it. Those who saw his performance as the villainous Duṣṭabuddhi in the screen play *Chandrahāsa* predicted a great future for him on the screen; but those who knew him intimately declared that he would never give up the stage for the screen. His untimely demise took away a glamour from the stage and a hope of the screen; with him went out another light which brightened the stage of North Karnatak.

VEERANNA :

It is humour that provides oil to the wheels of life and it has been

1. ‘ಭೀಷ್ಮಾಚಾರ್ಯರ ಪಾತ್ರಧಾರಣೆ ಅವರ ನಾಟಕಕಲೆಯ ಗೌರೀಶಂಕರ. ಬೆಳ್ಳೂರೆಯಂ ತಿರುವ ಕೇಶರಾಶಿಯಿಂದ ಅಲಂಕೃತರಾಗಿ ಅಂಗಾಂಗಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮುಖ್ಯನ ಕಂಪನವನ್ನು ಪ್ರಕಟಿಸುತ್ತ ನಾಟಕರಂಗವನ್ನು ಹೊಕ್ಕರೆಂದರೆ ಸಭಿಕರ ಅಂತರಂಗವನ್ನೇ ಹೊಕ್ಕಂತಾಗುತ್ತಿತ್ತು. —ಬಿ. ಬಿ. ಸಾಸನೂರ ( ಅದೇ )

2. Madhvaraja Umarji of Bijapur earned a name as a very successful actor of rare understanding and abilities. He worked with several professional troupes, and particularly, with the *Dattātraya Nāṭaka Mandali* for about ten years and was trained by Garud. He is compared to Varadachar in dignity and stature. His portrayal of roles like Harischandra, Krishna ( in *Akṣayāmbara*, *Kurukshetra* and *Raktarātri* ) and Arjuna ( in *Chitrāṅgada* ) is remembered to this day. Umarji who held a great promise to the Kannada Stage died in April 1952, at the age of 38.

an inevitable aspect of the theatre in its different phases. If the folk-stage provided laughter with its humorous roles like Kōdangi, Hanumanāyaka and Sārathi, the professional stage created scenes called 'Farces' and characters like 'the over-fed Brahmin, the greedy Vaiśya and the drunkard growing songful over his cups'. The Amateur stage created humour in a more intellectual manner apart from magnifying the emptiness and artificialities of individuals and situations. In its various manifestations, the stage humour which was 'physical' to a considerable extent on the folk and even on the professional stage, developed itself to become more intellectual and verbal on the amateur stage. Whatever its manifestation, and its platform, the actor portraying humorous roles became immediately popular and got away with an ugly expression or even an insulting remark at the audience when he used the weapon of humour in the way it should be.

The stage drama in Karnatak has had its own tradition of humour and discovered a number of artists who specialised in it. Theirs was a different method from the 'classical' type of acting the noble; theirs was a different technique in portrayal, often flouting the rigidity and dignity of the stage. They came to be loved by the spectator in spite of it, or rather, because of it. The comic actor was invariably a highly talented artist and was often better remembered by the audiences than the artist who played the hero. The performances of Lakshmiapati Shastri (Palace Company), Krishnamurthi Rao and Marirao (Ratnavali Company) Nakali Dodḍananajappa and 'Hanumān' Nanjundiah of North Karnatak are still widely remembered. In this line came G. H. Veeranna who has been giving hearty laughs to his crowded audiences for about fifty years now.

Veeranna has closely moved with the changing times and has successfully served the changing tastes. He is known more for his administrative abilities and shrewdness in keeping the ship of his professional troupe sailing smoothly. His fame as the most successful *producer* of pompous plays on the Kannada stage seems to have overshadowed his abilities as a comic actor. When closely noticed, Veeranna comes out as an intelligent artist of considerable talent. He set fashions in the portrayal of humorous roles.

Veeranna started with comical interludes called 'farces', but through the years, he created a lofty and rightful place for humour in the stage play—as an inevitable aspect of it. Initially, his method of evoking laughter was not an exception to the then accepted standard of low and loud humour—but he was a real *artist*—

for, he made even that, charming and sustaining. His genius was in the portrayal of roles of abnormal or subnormal nature and as such, roles like Ādimoori<sup>1</sup> in the play *Sadārame*, Makaranda in *Krishna leela*, Hasim in *Swāmi Niṣṭe* and Kakodara in *Kabirdās* earned a fame for him, and money for his company. With all his early emphasis on awkward contortions of the face, uncontrolled gesticulation and odd dresses in fast colours, he earned the title *Versatile Comedian*. Later, his performances placed considerable emphasis on a clever use of words and exploitation of funny situations. His methods also became refined and the people affectionately called him *Vinoda Ratnākara*. The critic recognised the elements of Charles Chaplin in his performances and called him the Chaplin of Karnatak.

Veeranna tried to play the roles of a tragic hero like that of Duryodhana in *Kurukṣetra* (1934)—with some success,<sup>2</sup> but his audiences were so much used to his humour, that they could not reconcile themselves to his portraying serious roles and so desired their *Nakali* Veeranna to come back to his own. Veeranna respected the feelings of his audience by coming back to portraying humorous roles again, and with his humour and satire, he achieved more than an actor who delivered sermons on morality and social behaviour could do. If he has turned film-minded to-day, the professional stage of Karnatak is the poorer for it.

#### HIRANNAYYA :

The tradition of stage humour initiated by the artists of the *Palace Company* and developed by versatiles like Krishnamoorthirao, K. Seetaramashastri of Hulimane, K. C. Chickka Jettappa and Veeranna was in a way perfected by K. Hirannayya, one of the most witty and intelligent actors of Karnatak. From the times of the jester and farces,

1. 'ವೈಶ್ಯನೊಬ್ಬನ ದುರಾಸೆ, ಭೀರು ಸ್ವಭಾವ ಅಸತ್ಯಪ್ರಿಯತೆಯನ್ನು ವೀರಣ್ಣನವರ ಹಾಗೆ ಯಾರೂ ಅಭಿನಯಿಸಲಾರರು.' —

A. N. Krishnarao : Karnatakada Kalavidaru I. p. 130.

2. ಕೊನೆಗೆ ವೀರಣ್ಣನಿಗೆ ದುರ್ಯೋಧನನ ಪಾತ್ರವನ್ನು ಅಭ್ಯಾಸ ಮಾಡಿಸತೊಡಗಿದೆ. ಅವರು ಹಾಸ್ಯ ಪ್ರಪಂಚದಲ್ಲಿಯೇ ನಲಿದಾಡಿದವರು. ನಾಲ್ಕುಣೆಯ ಪ್ರಪಂಚವನ್ನು ಕುಣಿ ಸುವುದಕ್ಕಾಗಿಯೇ ತಮ್ಮ ಶಕ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ವಿನಿಯೋಗಿಸಿದವರು. ಅದರೂ ಅವರಲ್ಲಿ ಗಂಭೀರ ಪಾತ್ರಗಳ ನಟನಾಶಕ್ತಿ ಇದೆ ಎಂದು ನನಗನ್ನಿಸುತ್ತಿತ್ತು. ಅದಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಕೆಲವುಬಾರಿ ಪಾಠ ಹೇಳಿದೆ—ಎಲ್ಲ ರಸಗಳನ್ನು ಚಿತ್ರಿಸಬಲ್ಲ ಶಕ್ತಿ ಅವರಲ್ಲಿತ್ತು ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ಮನಗಂಡೆ. ಹೀಗೆ ಚೆನ್ನಾದ ನಟನಾಗಬಲ್ಲ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯು ಯಾವಜೀವನ ಕಲಿ ಭೂಮಿಕೆಗಾಗಿ ದುಡಿಯುವುದನ್ನು ಕಂಡು ವ್ಯಥೆಯಾಯಿತು".

ಶಿವರಾಮಕಾರಂತ : ಹುಚ್ಚುಮನಸ್ಸಿನ ಹತ್ತು ಮುಖಗಳು. ಪುಟ ೧೩೦-೧೪೧

the stage humour had become a *part* of the play at the hands of Jettappa and Veeranna. Hirannayya caught the trend, shaped and sharpened the stage-humour into a potent double edged weapon, and couched it in the theme of the play itself. Humour almost became satire in his hands, with a lesson in it. The jester did not remain a secluded individual in Hirannayya's plays, but popped up his head in different garbs like a clever brahmin (in *Basavēśwara*), a learned cook (in *Panganāma*) a henpecked husband (in *Makmal Topi*), an ingenuous pimp (Najukayya in *Devadāsi*), or even as a determined *Śāstri* in the play *Ecchama Nāyaka*. Hirannayya's strong point was in the very angle from which he looked at even profound things. Humour became the bed-rock on which his edifice of morals and social philosophy came to be erected. It may be said that he was one of the most prominent of professional playwrights who wrote social satires in which humour was elevated to an intellectual status. His humour gave both a hearty laugh as also a serious thought and drove deep many a hometruth. He started from where Peer had left, and continued to serve and shape the popular taste by establishing the social play on the professional stage. He wrote and *acted* it out both for the pleasure and profit of the society.<sup>1</sup> He played pranks with the society, mocked at it and even insulted it, but the society loved him all the more, and looked at itself with a laugh. Hirannayya passed away in his mid forties, while on the stage, during a performance at Coorg a few months ago.<sup>2</sup> With him the theatre lost one of its illustrious luminaries.

#### STAGE-ARTISTS AND THEIR ECONOMIC CONDITION :

Throughout the long career of the Kannada Commercial stage, scores of other artists made a deep impression on their audiences with their potential talent at different times. They enhanced the prestige and popularity of the professional stage, but to-day, many of them like R. Nagendraraao, a reputed actor and close associate of A. V. Varadachar, H. L. N. Simha, author of *Samsāra Nauka*, the talented M. V. Rajamma, B. Jayamma, Vasudev Girimaji, Honnappa Bhagavatar, Mahabalarao, G. V. Iyer, Balkrishna and Narayanacharya of the Gubbi Company,

1. ಎತ್ತ ನೋಡಿದರೂ ಜೀನದಲ್ಲಿ ಜಂಜಡ, ನಿರ್ದಿಷ್ಟತೆ, ಅಲಸ್ಯಗಳೇ ಕಂಡುಬರುವಾಗ ಜನ ತೆಗೆ ನಗೆಯ ಔಷಧಿಯನ್ನಿತ್ತು ಅವರನ್ನು ಕೆಲಕಾಲವಾದರೂ ರಸಲೋಕಕ್ಕೆ ಬಯ್ಯು ನಿತ್ಯಜೀವನವನ್ನು ಮತ್ತೆ ಎದುರಿಸಲು ಜೈತನ್ಯ ತುಂಬಬಲ್ಲ ಶಕ್ತಿ-ಹಿರಿಯಶಕ್ತಿ. ಹಿರಣ್ಯಯ್ಯ ನವರು ಮಾಡುತ್ತಿರುವುದು ಕೇವಲ ಕಲಾಸೇವೆಯಲ್ಲ-ಮಾನವವರ್ಗದ ಸೇವೆ- ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರಸೇವೆ.

ಅ. ನ. ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾವ್ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ಕಲಾನಿದರು II ಪುಟ ೧೨೪.

2. In February 1953.

and Hunsur Krishnamurthi, author of *Dharma Ratnākara* are not seen on the stage, as they have turned to films for careers. Many others like Basavaraj Mansur, an acclaimed musician-actor of North Karnataka, Sāntakumār, an intelligent stage-comedian, the famed Seshachar of the *Seshakala Mandali* have been obliged to withdraw from the stage, owing to a lack of social patronage. From a third point of view, the professional stage seems to be unfortunate, for, quite a number of talented artists like Peer, Handignur, Madhvarao Umarji and Hirannayya who could compare well with the best actors of other regions died only too prematurely, just at a time when they had established themselves, and were most needed by the Kannada stage. It was in such artists the theatre centred its hopes.

Even under such disillusioning circumstances, many an actor has clung to the stage with hunger in his stomach and hope in the heart. There is a real need to keep the actor above want as, it is around him that a professional troupe revolves, and it is he who gives strength and glamour to the stage. Even to-day, in the age of 'inviting' films and the 'intellectual' amateur stage, social patronage is earned by a professional troupe if it has a team of good artists or at least one or two of them who are outstanding in their talent.

The public seems to take more easily and dearly to an outstanding actor rather than even to a merited play or imposing production, for the obvious reason, that while the latter remains static and even monotonous, the talented artist changes the shades of his portrayal every time and adds freshness to the performance. The saying that 'Shakespeare is static but Irving is always new' is symbolic of a general truth.

The actor is the life-blood of the stage and pride of a region,—but yet, even to day, the economic condition of a Kannada artist is utterly deplorable, though his social status has improved gradually. An actor of average talent in Mysore area would earn under normal conditions, an average income of fifteen to twentyfive rupees per month; he would be unemployed for about five months in the year; he would have toured about fifteen villages and cities; he would have taken part in about a hundred performances; he would have become a victim to habits which he could not afford and he would have got in to small debts to the tune of about three hundred rupees a year.<sup>1</sup> An actor would

1. Taken from the statistics prepared in 1942 by C. Anandarao considering eight actors who worked in uncertain professional troupes of Mysore for a year on the average. (MISS). Conditions of actors in North Karnataka are not better in the total, though their income is slightly more than those in Mysore.

become unable to fulfil his duties after a regular service of about fifteen years, and six out of ten artists usually suffered from incurable diseases including Tuberculosis and Asthma. This state of affairs may not exist in well established concerns like the Gubbi's, wherein actors are better paid and allowed to enjoy privileges like Annual Leave and Maintenance Allowances for families. The state of affairs is not true again, in the exceptional cases of highly talented actors whose monthly income would reach the average of a hundred and fifty rupees, and whom the professional troupes rivalled to possess. It is not true either of an actress of even the average talent, for, she was usually better placed and cared for by the leader of the troupe. It may be said incidentally, that many a marriage between artists of the same professional troupe has made the general atmosphere a little bright and healthier. Yet on the whole, the general condition of the professional artist is even to-day deplorable. Many a stage-actor is in no way inferior in talent or intelligence to a film actor, and yet, the disparity in their income provides a picture of glaring contrast. The economic condition of the stage-actor demands to be considered with all urgency and seriousness, for, without placing him in security and above want, the theatre cannot remain stable. The revival and regulation of the professional theatre depends in a large measure on its artist, – educated and economically better placed.

## V

### DEVELOPMENT IN THEATRE CONDITIONS

#### THE PERFORMANCE:

During the short span of about eighty years, the professional stage made a slow but steady progress in the methods of showmanship. Considerable improvement was also made with regard to some of the fundamental aspects of the stage—like stage music, make up, settings, scenery and methods of portrayal. The theatre often gave in, though unwillingly, to the popular demands, and amended its ways both in regard to the theme and the manner of presentation. The extent of the stage development would reveal itself when a dramatic performance of the present day is compared with the ones, staged half a century ago. Reminiscences of some of the veteran stage artists belonging to different parts of Karnatak<sup>1</sup> compared favourably in giving a picture of very similar theatrical conditions all over the Kannada country.

Then, the troupe which usually consisted of about thirty persons halted to stage plays at every village including the ones which had just about two hundred families. Immediately after reaching the village, all the actors including even the 'hero' who enjoyed exclusive privileges and a maximum monthly pay of Rs. 15/- would set out to erect the stage called *Chappara*.<sup>2</sup> A pit would be dug in the immediate front of the stage. It was called the "chairs pit" (*Kurchi Halla*), though actually, the troupe could not afford chairs to put in there. In this pit of about fifty sq. feet were put some logs of wood to improvise a sort of benches for the spectators of the 'upper class'. When a local dignitary or the official came to witness the play, he brought his own chair. The stage would be ready by the evening with an enclosure around the spacious arena. If it ever rained in the middle of a performance, the actors hurriedly bundled up all the equipment and retired to resume

1. G. H. Veeranna (Mysore)—*Nataka Rangadalli Nanna Anubhavagalu—Prajānat* (Bangalore): Republic Day Issue—1953.  
Garud Sadashivarao: (N. Karnatak)—*Reminiscences*. (MSS).  
Kandagal Hanumantharao (N. Karnatak.) *Kannada Stage Fifty Years Ago*. (A broadcast speech).  
Shivaram Karanth: (S. Kanara). References to the Kannada Stage in *Huchhu-manassina Hattu Mukhagalu*.
2. In North Karnatak early plays were usually staged in specious halls of buildings (in the first floor) and so, this reference is in regard to the conditions in Mysore.

the play only after the skies became clear. The villager gave a measured quantity of some commodity like paddy, cotton, groundnut, coconut, coffee seeds or grams instead of regular money as entrance fee.<sup>1</sup> The grains thus collected were later sold to realise the money. Each performance would mean an expense of about thirty rupees, but the return on a rush-day would be well near a hundred rupees. Publicity to the play was given by the village crier. Handbills were printed only by reputed troupes; but they were kept in the personal custody of the proprietor, who, on no account would spare more than eight or ten of them in a village.

It was the rolling-up curtain—a miracle in the eye of the rural spectator—rather than the play itself that attracted the entire village to witness the performances initially. The stage had the front and rear curtains and also 'drops' on the sides. The drop curtains kept hanging loose and travelled on the shoulders of every incoming or outgoing role. Kerosene lamps were kept in a row in front of the first curtain. The prestige of a professional troupe depended upon the number and size of the lamps. Stage settings were scanty and often improvised. The throne of the inevitable King was always a shaky structure made of an arrangement of kerosene tins, and covered with a coloured cloth. It was literally the privilege of the King alone to sit on the Durbar Scene. His courtiers could not afford any seats.

The Make-up was simple. *Ingulika*, the native reddish grey provided the foundation colour to the face and the black of the charcoal was liberally used for colouring the eye brows and moustaches. Crape-hair was yet unknown. After 'making-up', the final touch was given by smearing the face with *Abhraka*, the 'gold powder'. Any person could play the lady-role with the help of a piece of black cloth tied around the head and a string of artificial 'pearls' dropping from the centre to indicate the parting of hair. The entire equipment of the green room was a big wooden box containing all the dresses. It was on this box the lamp was placed and all the actors sat around, with small mirrors in hands while colouring the faces. The size of the mirror usually indicated the status of the actor.<sup>2</sup>

1. "ಭತ್ತ, ರಾಗಿ, ಜೋಳ, ಹತ್ತಿ, ಕಾಫಿಬೀಜ, ಜಲಕ್ಯ, ನೆಲಗಡಲೆ, ತೆಂಗಿನಕಾಯಿ ಕೊಬ್ಬರಿ ಯಾವುದಾದರೂ ಸರಿಯೆ ಗೇಟಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಪಡೆದು ಒಳಗೆ ಬಿಡಲಾಗುತ್ತಿತ್ತು" ಬಿ. ಎಚ್. ವೀರಣ್ಣ. 'ಕನ್ನಡ ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ನನ್ನ ಅನುಭವಗಳು'.

ಪ್ರಜಾಮತ: ಸ್ವತಂತ್ರ್ಯ ಸಂಚಿಕೆ—೧೯೫೩.

2. 'ರಾಜಾ ಪಾರ್ಥದಾಸನಿಗೆ ಒಂದಾಣೆ ಕನ್ನಡಿ; ಉಳಿದವರಿಗೆ ಮೂರುಮೂರು ಕಾಸಿನ ಕನ್ನಡಿಗಳು'

A. N. Krishna Rao—*Karnāṭakada Kalāvidaru* I-p. 117.

Neither was there any such distinguishing feature among the different roles as could be marked by the dresses they wore. Only when they talked, one could distinguish the king from his courtiers. Each actor was given a pair of socks, a long shirt, a necklace and a head-dress which he had to preserve with care. The artist wore them all, immaterial of what role he played; he wore the socks and the necklace even if it was the role of an orthodox Brahmin, lest some other actor should use it if it was left behind in the Green-room.<sup>1</sup> It was a usual custom to go round the village to borrow colourful sarces and ornaments for the evening's show. The audience would usually recognise the ornaments worn by the characters as belonging to a particular family or the other, while the play was on. Sometimes ornaments and head-dresses had to be borrowed even from the audiences. Quite often, members of the audience volunteered to lend the actor their shawls, walking-sticks and ornaments. This fact at once reflects on the meagre equipment of the professional troupes on the one hand and on the other, the survival of an element of the most ancient theatrical principle, the absence of any separatism between the performer and the audience.

The plays were mostly written on mythological themes. If there arose a desire among the people of the village to see a *different* play, it was soon got up and staged without much difficulty, as it was only the theme that would be really altered rather than the costumes, make up, settings or scenery.<sup>2</sup> Mostly the available songs were freely drawn upon with minor alterations to suit the new play. Actors were mostly illiterates, and yet, the secret of the troupe's success was the undaunted enthusiasm of both the players and spectators to please and to be pleased.

The plays were infested with songs. The audience would not consider him an actor who did not sing a good number of songs.<sup>3</sup> Each time when the curtain came down, it was a custom to sing

1. The socks are given up only recently. A review of the play *Sati Sāvitrī* staged on 10 March, 1934, by the *Sarasvatī Prasādīta Nāṭaka Mandali* of M. V. Madappa mentioned that King *Aśvapati* wore a pair of socks while performing penance to please the Gods. The socks are even now continued on the folk stage, particularly in *Doddāṭa* and *Sanṣṭāṭa*.

2. Kandgal Hanumantharao, *Op. cit.*

3. ಸಾಸಾನ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಎಲ್ಲ ನಾಟಕಗಳೂ ಮೊದಲಿನಿಂದ ಕೊನೆಯವರೆಗೂ ಸಂಸಾರಮಯ, ಕೂತರೆ ಪದ, ನಿಂತರೆ ಪದ, ಭಾವಚಿತ್ರ ಬರೆಯಲು ಹೇಳಲು ಪದ, ಬರೆದದ್ದಕ್ಕೆ ಪದ, ಚಾರನನ್ನು ಕರೆಯುವುದಕ್ಕೆ ಪದ, ಚಾರನು ತಾನು ಬಂದೆನೆಂದು ಹೇಳುವುದಕ್ಕೆ ಪದ, ಪದವನ್ನು ಹಾಡದೆ ಪಾರ್ಕು ಮಾಡುವುದೆಂದರೆ ಅದೊಂದು ವಿಧವಾದ ಅಗೌರವವೆಂದು ಭಾವನೆ.

---ಜಿ. ಎಚ್. ನೀರಣ್ಣ --- (ಅದೇ).

again from behind the screen in order 'to engage' the audience. The only accompaniments were the Violin and Tabla and naturally, every actor had to adjust the pitch of his voice to the common single pitch, the *Sruti* of the instrument, with obvious disadvantages. Songs were often philosophical and moral in import, and many of them being compositions of saint poets like Purandaradāsa and Kanakadāsa, captured the audience and 'brought credit to the performance—'. Quite some incongruities had come to be accepted, like the king announcing the gift of half of his kingdom to every one who brought him a bit of good news, and, the good news was brought to him at least half a dozen times. The wild gesticulations could not be anywhere near artistic acting. Wild movement of the extended hands invariably accompanied the spoken word and when the actor became silent, the tired hands rested on the waist. A King, a demon and in fact, the hero always engaged his right hand in the usual heroic method of twirling the moustache while playing the role, and his partner on the stage would be naturally standing still and cold like an immovable statue.

#### PLAY-HOUSES :

Many of these old stage-methods seem to have persisted to reveal themselves glaringly even after the turning of the century. With the increasing financial stability of professional troupes, their performances became a whit more natural and certainly, more imposing. The well-to-do ones equipped themselves with their own tents to provide better shelter to the village audiences and also better seating arrangements with chairs and benches ( *Kālu maṇe* ) for upper classes. In the cities, where the halls proved insufficient to house the crowding audiences, spacious pandals were erected. The Palace Company of Mysore started the tradition of constructing them in the nineties of the last century, and by 1920, Varadachar, Veeranna, Shirahatti Venkobarao, Garud and all other important professionals moved with their heavy but mobile equipment to construct at a short notice, spacious pandals to house even 1,500 to 2,000 spectators. Later still, the zinc-sheet pandal put up in 1934 by Veeranna in Bangalore and Mysore for showing the play *Kurukshetra* accommodated about 4,000 spectators. The Gubbi Company, during its extensive touring of South India after 1935, had to move only in *special* trains because of its huge equipment and personnel. In addition to the improvised structures at different places, regular play-houses came to be constructed in big cities both by individual proprietors like Veeranna and K. Hirannayya, and also by local institutions. The Municipal Town-halls that sprang

up almost in every important city in Mysore made specific provision for the performances of plays by visiting troupes. Such bountiful construction of regular play-houses is not seen in North Karnatak, though big cities like Hubli, Dharwar, Belgaum and Gadag prove exceptions. By the year 1930, every important city in Karnatak had its own play-house. It is a fact however, that many of them lacked the fundamental conveniences like separate Green-rooms, good ventilation and decent seating arrangement. Yet they provided a place for performances.

Neither the troupe nor the audiences seemed to mind the manifold inconveniences in these play-houses, but after the advent of the Talkies late in the thirties of the century, the stage suffered a major set-back, because many of these play-houses were immediately converted into film-houses. Some others which persisted in continuing as play-houses, yielded later to become granaries during the Second World War. A few of the theatres in big cities like Bangalore Mysore, Mangalore, Tumkur, Hubli and Gadag, however, remained exceptions. Many a troupe which could not afford its own pandal, suffered a gradual death. The years that followed were gloomy for the professional troupe, and it looked that after the Second World War with the prices of commodities soaring high, nether the city nor the village could afford to build play-houses. But the cinema did not suffer. Every good village built its own film-house. Leading cities built tens of them at huge costs but even the biggest city in Karnatak has not yet built up a worthy play-house with sufficient stage equipment, provision for theatrical devices and a well ventilated and comfortable auditorium.

#### THE DURATION:

The Stage had remained the play-ground of Gods, Kings and Queens even in the first quarter of the present century; the characters 'talked and sang and sang and talked' with only soliloquies and battles in between. They surely served the gallery and got from it claps and "once mores". The professional play was yet a moral preacher with long sermons. The performance usually went on for five hours at least. This condition which prevailed in 1928<sup>1</sup>, had not improved even in

1. ನಾಟಕಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ೫ ಅಂಕಗಳನ್ನು ೩ ಕ್ಕೆ ಇಳಿಸಿದರೆ ಮೂರು ವರ್ಷ ಸಜ್ಜೆ. ೪೦ ಪ್ರವೇಶಗಳನ್ನು ೪ ಕ್ಕೆ ಎಳೆದು ತಂದರೆ ನಾರಾಯಣನೇ ಗತಿ. ನಮ್ಮ ನಾಟ್ಯ ಕವಿಗಳಿಗೆ ಅವರನ್ನು ಬಿಟ್ಟು ನಟನಟಿಸ್ಥಾನ, ಕಾಲ ಪಾತ್ರಗಳ ಬಗ್ಗೆಟ್ಟು, ಸ್ವೇಚ್ಛಾ ಮ್ಯಾನೇಜರು, ಸೀನುಗಳ ಬದಲಾವಣೆಯ ಕಷ್ಟ, ನೋಟಕರ ಅನಾನುಕೂಲಗಳು ಇಂತಹ ಇನ್ನೂ ಸಾವಿರಾರು ವಿಚಾರಗಳಿವೆ ಎನ್ನುವ ಅಲೋಚನೆಯೇ ಇಲ್ಲ. ಅದುದರಿಂದಲೇ ಅವರ ಸೃಷ್ಟಿ ನಾಟಕವಲ್ಲ — ಅಂಜನೇಯನ ಬಾಲ. —ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ— ಫೆಬ್ರವರಿ ೧೯೨೮. ಪುಟ ೯೩.

the year 1935 when *Kurukshetra* of the 'Gubbis' went on for six hours.<sup>1</sup> Many a time the sleeping 'spectator' had to be disturbed from his slumber for the final scene.<sup>2</sup> Songs and soliloquies were specially devised to pad up the play, so that it could be drawn to the desired length. A series of attacks on the unnecessary length of the play gradually reduced it to about four hours by 1940, and brought out a better unity of impression in it.

#### STAGE SETTINGS:

Appropriate settings and scenery always played a specific part on the stage to help creating and sustaining the illusion of the drama. The early troupes of Karnatak realised the contribution of scenery, settings and costumes to the fulfilment of the play, from the performances of the visiting Parsi troupes, but invariably they over emphasised the trick and crowded the stage with heavy settings, often inappropriately. The Palace Company of Mysore was perhaps the best equipped troupe in its times. Shirahatti Venkobarao and Shivamurthiswami Kanbargimath of North Karnatak paid a great attention towards making their performances pompous with fabulous stage equipment. But on the other hand, many an other troupe had but the four inevitable curtains of the 'Durbar Scene', 'Forest Scene', 'Street Scene', and the 'Home Scene'. The same curtains were used to provide the 'background' for different scenes in any play. These common curtains later acquired some incongruous paintings on modern subjects and a bold blatant mention of the painter's name. Even mythological plays were staged with modern paintings on the background curtain, and more often than not, the very elementary principles of providing appropriate settings, scenery, costumes, ornaments and weapons to reflect the times of the theme were clearly flouted.<sup>1</sup> Many a time the effect

1. *Vishvakarnatak* — A Bangalore Daily, 21st January, 1935.

2. ವೆಂಕೋಬರಾಯರ ಹಳೆಯ ನಾಟಕ — ರಾಮ ಸಾದುಕಾ ಪಟ್ಟಾಭಿಷೇಕ-ದಲ್ಲಿ ನಗಾರಿ ಬಾರಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯು ಬೆಳಗಿನ ಐದರ ಸುಮಾರು ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯನ್ನು ಪ್ರವೇಶಿಸಿ ಮಲಗಿದವರನ್ನು ಎಚ್ಚರಿಸಿ : ರಾಮಪಟ್ಟಾಭಿಷೇಕವಾಗುತ್ತದೆ — ಏಳಿರಿ' ಎಂದು ಹೇಳುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ಕಾಲವೂ ಒಂದಿತ್ತು.

ಆರ್. ವೈ. ಧಾರವಾಡಕರ — 'ಕನ್ನಡ ಕಂಪನಿ ನಾಟಕಗಳು' ಜಯಂತಿ — ಸವರಿಬರ್ ೧೯೫೦ ಪುಟ ೨೩೫.

1. ದೃಶ್ಯಯೋಜನೆ, ನಟರ ವೇಷಭೂಷಣಗಳು, ರಂಗದಲ್ಲಿ ಉಪಯೋಗಿಸುವ ಹೀತಗಳು, ಕತ್ತಿ, ವೇತ್ರ, ಲೇಖನಿ ಪಾತ್ರ, ಮುಂತಾದ ವಸ್ತುಗಳು, ನಾಟಕದ ಕಾಲ ಧರ್ಮಗಳಿಗನುಗುಣವಾಗಿರಬೇಕೆಂಬುದು ರಂಗಾಲಂಕಾರದ ಮೊದಲ ನಿಯಮ. ಈಗಿನ ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಈ ನಿಯಮದ ಅತಿಕ್ರಮಣವನ್ನು ನಾವು ಎಲ್ಲೆಲ್ಲಿಯೂ ಕಾಣಬಹುದು. ಮದ್ರಾಸ್

of a moving sequence or a piece of good acting was shattered by an odd and ugly background curtain and unnatural settings.

"If you stood in front of those curtains and play a comedy it would surely become a tragedy and a tragedy would become a hilarious comedy."<sup>1</sup> The curtains persisted in spite of critics.

This lack of judgement was witnessed in the make-up and costumes which often looked strikingly unreal. While the financially unsound troupes borrowed sarces and made paper-crowns, the rich ones provided a glaring contrast, for, what was lacking in the one was *overdone* in the other. The troupes of the second category sometimes went to the extent of presenting *Shakuntala* the innocent hermit girl in heavy and fabulous costumes; 'some times even with a wrist watch and spectacles.'<sup>2</sup> Till the beginning of the thirties, a glaring artificiality in settings, costumes and an over-colouring in make-up seem to have been an accepted trait of the professional performances. The make-up looked so alien to Indian themes that in 1921, Jinaraja Dasa pleaded for a change in the method of play-presentation.

"We live in India and let us give a picture of Indian life—no-where else is make-up ever intended to disguise the nationality of actor....Such a famous English actor as Sir Bencroft comes on the stage for many a part without touching up the face in the least degree."<sup>3</sup>

Yet up to the time of Peer, there were but a few instances of agreeable and natural settings in play-production, because the merit of the play of a professional troupe had come to be judged entirely on the qualities of transfer-scenes, settings, costumes and dances rather than, on the merit of the theme itself and the plot construction. It had been the aim of professional troupes to overshadow the fabulous methods of Parsi productions and indeed, some troupes like that of Veeranna, of Venkobarao and of Shivamurthiswami did succeed in their attempts. *Kurukshetra* of the Gubbi Company could be cited as an example,

ಹೈಕೋರ್ಟಿನ ಮುಂದೆ ಕೃಷ್ಣಗೋಪಿಯರು ಬಂದು ಜಜ್ಜಂದವಾಡುವುದು, ಕಬ್ಬನ್ ಪಾರ್ಕಿನಲ್ಲಿ ನಾರದ ಮಹರ್ಷಿಯ ಕಥಾಶ್ರವಣ, ಬಂಗಲೆಯ ವರಾಂಡದಲ್ಲಿ, ದೇವಸ್ಥಾನದ ಅಂಗಳದಲ್ಲಿ ರಾಯರು ಸಂಸಾರ ಹೂಡುವುದು ಇತ್ಯಾದಿ ಅಸಂಗತಗಳು ನಮ್ಮ ರಂಗ ಭೂಮಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯ. ಏ. ಪುಟ್ಟಸ್ವಾಮಯ್ಯ, 'ನಾಟ್ಯರಂಗ—ಚಿತ್ರರಂಗ', ಪುಟ ೪೦

1. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya: *Kalā*, Sept. 1931. p. 106

2. H. K. Veerannagouda. 'Condition of our Stage': *Rangabhoomi* Dec., 1926 pp. 71-74.

3. Jinaraja Dasa: Proceedings of the First All India Dramatic Conference, 1921. Reports pp. 69-71.

for, it attracted thousands of people from villages and cities because of its fabulous transfer-scenes of Krishna's apartment, of *Geetopadesha*, of *Sharatalpa*, and also on account of the movement of elephants, horses and chariots across the stage in the battle scenes. It became an imposing example of the most pompous productions on the Kannada stage. It was spectacular indeed, with its settings and scenery. Many a professional troupe aimed at emulating the daring example of the Gubbi Company, but it failed. Such overdoing of settings sacrificed all directness, simplicity and symbolism. The advertising handbills of the early thirties reflected on the tastes of the audience, as also on the attractions publicised by the stage. In bold print they shouted: "New Scenery! New Dress!! New Play!!! Women play roles! There are Parsi dances! Artists have been honoured with trophies and medals by Rajas and Maharajas!. A girl aged 16 years will also take part in the play!"<sup>1</sup> The handbills usually contained some warnings—"The audience may shout 'once more's for a song: but it is left to the entire choice of the actor to repeat the song or not! Police will be in attendance during the performance and will take charge of persons who change from lower classes to upper classes! On no account will the money be refunded!"

#### STAGE MUSIC:

Music was rampant on the professional stage. In North Karnatak it was influenced by the indigenous folk and home tunes,<sup>2</sup> and later by Marathi stage songs; while in Mysore, it seems to have developed on comparatively independent lines, though a few tunes 'were borrowed from Bombay'. Varadachar refined the stage-music of Mysore and set new fashions in singing the *Kanda* and *Vrta* in classical Karnatak style. Lyrics were often couched in the set notations of compositions of Tyagaraja. The play itself opened with a *Vrta* in the raga *Nāta* and was followed by a *Kṛti* in *Telugu*—composed by Tyagaraja. Both

1. Handbills published in *Kangabhoomi*. Sept., 1928. pp. 12-15.

2. ಚುರಮರಿಯವರ ಶಾಕುಂತಲದ ಅನೇಕ ಪದ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ಹಳ್ಳಿಯ ಹಾಗೂ ಹೆಣ್ಣು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಹಾಡಿನ ಧಾಟಿಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಕೂಡಿಸಿರುವುದು ಅಲ್ಲಿನ ಸೂಚನೆಗಳಿಂದ ತಿಳಿಯುತ್ತದೆ. ಉದಾಹರಣೆ: — " ದಾಟಿ — ' ನಡಿಸಬಿ, ಕುಂಜಬನದಲಿ ಪೋಗುನು, ಮುರಲಿಯ ಕೇಳುನು' ಎಂಬ ಪದದಂತೆ " ( ಪುಟ ೩ ), ' ದಾಟಿ: ' ಯಾಕೆ ತಡಾ ಸುಂದರಾಂಗಾನ್ಯಾಕೆ ಕರ. ತಾರೆರೆ ಬೇಕಾದಂಥಾ ವಸ್ತ್ರಾನೀವೆ ಬೇಗ ಪೋಗಿ ಬಾರೆ ' ಎಂಬ ಪದದಂತೆ " ( ಪುಟ ೧೦ ) ಅಥವಾ ಮತ್ತೊಂದು ಜಾವಡಿ — " ದಾಟಿ: ಬಿಳಗಾದ ಮೇಲೆ ಬ್ಯಾಸರಿಸುವುದೊಳಿತೆ ಸುಂದರಾ..... " ಎಂಬಂತೆ ( ಪುಟ ೧೬ ) ಮೊದಲಾದವು — ( ಶಾಕುಂತಲ ನಾಟಕ ೧೯೩೪ )

in North Karnatak and Mysore, the professional actor indulged in lengthy musical elaborations, unmindful of either the duration of the play, its propriety in the sequence or the play's unity of impression.

Music and dance were the fundamentals of drama, but then, Bharata warned against overdoing any of them at the cost of a harmonious blending and beauty.<sup>1</sup> The professional stage somehow disturbed the balance between music and the other aspects of drama by overdoing the former—especially in the early stages of its career. Almost every speech and action was musically elaborated. A stage play in the first quarter of the 20th century usually had 'eighty to hundred songs and twenty to thirty *Kanda* and *Vrtta*.<sup>2</sup> It was not different on the Marathi stage, where music had become 'the greatest blemish of the Marathi productions.'<sup>3</sup> Arjuna in the play *Saubhadra* had to sing twenty-six songs in the first act alone.<sup>4</sup> It was the same situation all over South India, and the Telugu stage in particular, is said to have been influenced by the Kannada professional troupes with regard to its musical excesses.<sup>5</sup> Even at the oddest moments like the fight and escape, musical elaborations were indulged in. Even Varadachar paused to sing a leisurely-song while chasing the deer as Dushyanta, or while chasing the escaping Draupadi, as Keechaka. It was common that the hero sang before chasing the bandits who abducted the heroine—musically elaborating as to what he would do to the bandits when he caught them. 'A mother with a child at the point of death would sing a pathetic song in two or three *rāgās* keeping perfect time the while, and it must be said to the credit of the child that it very obligingly refused to die till the music also came to a dying close.' An 'able actor' some times ignored his role to perform a regular musical concert by singing songs which were favourite to the audiences in response to their applauses, whistles and

- 1 ಗೀರ ವಾದ್ಯೇ ಚ ನೃತ್ಯೇಚ | ಪ್ರವತ್ಸೇತಿಪ್ರಸಂಗತಃ |  
ಬೇದೋಭವೇತ್ ಪ್ರಯೋಕ್ತೃಣಾಂ | ಪ್ರೇಕ್ಷಣಾಂ ತಥೈವ ಚ || ನಾಟ್ಯಶಾಸ್ತ್ರ II ೧೬೦.
2. ಒಂದೊಂದು ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲೂ ೮೦-೧೦೦ ಹಾಡುಗಳೂ ೨೦-೩೦ ಕಂದಗಳೂ ಇರುತ್ತಿದ್ದವು. ಪ್ರತಿಯೊಂದು ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲೂ, ರಾಜ, ಮಂತ್ರಿ, ಸೇನಾಪತಿ ಈ ತ್ರಿಮೂರ್ತಿಗಳ ಪ್ರವೇಶ ನೊದಲು ಆಗಬೇಕಿತ್ತು. ಅವರ ಮಾತು, ಕಥೆ, ಯೋಗಕ್ಷೇಮವೆಲ್ಲ ಹಾಡುಗಳಲ್ಲೇ ನಡೆಯುತ್ತಿತ್ತು. ಹಾಡು ಮುಗಿದ ಮೇಲೆ "ಈ ರೀತಿ ಇದೆ" ಅಂದು ಹೇಳುವುದೇ ನಾಡಿಕೆ. —ಎ. ಎನ್. ಕೃಷ್ಣರಾವ್ : ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ಕಲಾವಿದರು. [ಪುಟ ೧೧೭-೧೧೮]
3. R. K. Yajnik. *The Indian Theatre* : P. 122.
4. Garud Sadashivarao : *Reminiscences*. (MSS).
5. In his introduction to the play *Chitra Nalaniam*, D. Krishnamacharlu, the Father of the Telugu Drama observed that he *had to* crowd the play with songs as 'the Kannada plays are so full of them'.

once mores.' And if it was a musical duet between rivals, the audience themselves had to intervene to bring about a peaceful end to the play.<sup>1</sup> Music, instead of lifting the play, lifted itself at the cost of the play and disturbed the balance and good impression.

Many an artless individual found place on the stage only because of his or her music. Though an illiterate, a dancing girl played the heroine mainly because of her musical abilities. It naturally became a hindrance to the progress of the stage, and an insult to its morality. After the advent of social themes, the undue importance enjoyed by music began to sink steadily. Enlightened artists like Garud, Raghavachar, Peer and Hirannayya were responsible in showing the stage-music its rightful place in drama. They established with the examples of their own performances that a play social, historical or even mythological could sustain itself and capture the audiences without music in it. They showed that a real actor with a sense of rational portrayal, could make a glorious stage-career without being able to sing. To-day, the stage-music is at its low ebb, if not totally absent. The professional stage has yet to learn that the objection is not to the stage music itself—far from it—but to an indiscriminate employment of it; it has yet to strike a compromise between the excesses and a total absence of it.

#### WOMEN-ARTISTS:

As in Maharashtra, and unlike in Bengal, the professional theatre of Karnatak—particularly in its early period, avoided woman on the stage. The Kritapura Mandali, the Halasagi Troupe, The Palace Company and the Ratnavali Troupe had impressive careers without including women-artists in their performances. Garud Sadashivarao started his troupe in 1916, but did not entertain actresses until 1931, when a resolution was passed by the Second Drama Conference at Bangalore in favour of including women in professional troupes. Women artists were seen on the stage only as exceptions till the twenties though they were encouraged by the Konnur Company in North Karnatak and by the Gubbi Company in Mysore, as early as in the last decade of the last century.<sup>2</sup> Women, indeed, gave a natural tone to stage-plays. And

1. In the play *Chitrāṅgada* when Arjuna (S. Rama Rao, a Court-musician of Mysore) and Babruvahana (B. Shrinivas Iyengar, also a Court-musician) went on for more than two hours with musical '*saval and jawab*' in different *rāgās*, each aiming at outdoing his professional rival, and ultimately, the audience had to intervene between them: *Rangabhoomi*. July, 1928. p. 181.
2. Available evidence indicate that the Gubbi Company had a lady artist by name Rajamma in the year 1891. (Kannada Stage Centenary Vol. I—

(Contd.)

they made the commercial purpose of the theatre better fulfilled. Many a troupe hurried to find women-artists having good voices and brought dancing girls on the stage. Their examples, however, were unwelcome to the conservative section of the society, for 'it made the actor yield to immoral influences on the one hand, and prompted the audience to measure the worth of a play on false values'.

From the early twenties of this century, there arose a controversy regarding the inclusion of women-artists in stage-plays. Individuals, institutions and the public took active interest in the controversy.<sup>1</sup> The conservative section of theatre-goers opined that many an evidence revealed that a man would portray the woman's role with an ease and emphasis that could hardly be achieved by the self-conscious actress.<sup>2</sup> They said that only the morally loose women (professional dancing girls) with their single qualification of musical accomplishments volunteered to the stage, the temple of popular art, to render it impure with their bad ways, and that it was an irony that such women, morally so low, portrayed the great roles of Seeta and Chandramati. They said finally that the drama itself was an illusion—and if the man played the woman in it, it was a worthy part of that illusion; that the folk theatre in its representative modes like Yakshagana and Dodddata had not entertained women artists had not suffered a whit in its impression on that account.

Counter arguments were launched by the Progressive Section of spectators. They left the question of the artist's immorality to his own

P. 93). The first lady artist of North Karnatak was one Yallavva who joined Konnur Company of Shivamurthiswami Kanbargimath in 1889 to play the heroine along with her husband Gurulingappa who was a well known artist working with the same troupe. (Collected from Pandit C. Y. Kavali, MSS).

1. Heated correspondence went on in the columns of news papers and magazines. The Amateur Dramatic Association arranged a public debate on the subject in November, 1931. The debaters went into heated arguments. The prompters in favour of the inclusion of women-artists pleaded with the public for sympathetic consideration, as the stage would be unrealistic without women on it, like the temple without God, and the house without housewife; but the audience voted AGAINST including them in theatrical performances.
2. The same conservative opinion prevailed in Maharashtra — that gifted boys could do justice to female roles, could act without unnecessary shyness, could speak more distinctly and could win a greater glory by overcoming the handicap of nature. (Report of the Marathi Dramatic Conference—Poona. 1929). This was of course a 'modern' view as against the ancient and orthodox opinion expressed in *Shivateelamrita* which prescribed a method of purification for he who even saw a man playing the role of woman.

ಪುರುಷನ ಪೋಷಣೆ ದೇವತಾಂ ಸಾಚಾರ ।

ಸಜ್ಜಲೇ ಸ್ವಾನ ಕರಾಂವೇ ॥ ೧೭ ॥

—ಕವಿಲೇಲಾಮೃತ VII

individual concern and considered the theatrical art itself in relation to this issue. To them it was only *natural* that women played women's roles.<sup>1</sup> Even the best of actors while portraying lofty roles like that of Seeta, Sāvitrī and Rādhā could at best express *lust* but not *love*. Only a woman could infuse a cheerful atmosphere all around, and put an end to the glaring expression of love-talk indulged in on the stage by the 'male-females' and the resultant bad example set for the young boys and girls in the auditorium. The woman was to have her rightful place on the stage also, as she played a major role in all human activity.<sup>2</sup> They pointed out the possibility of women taking part in ancient Sanskrit drama because of the creation of the role of *Natī* and the hint provided by Kālidāsa that great women-artists like Urvashi played the roles of heroines.<sup>3</sup> They spoke of the other regional theatres, particularly of Bengal which had made a great progress on account of its women-artists who uniformly maintained the dignity and high standards of Hindu ideals.<sup>4</sup> Thus the controversy did considerable dust-raising in Mysore.

The subject could have substantial arguments on both sides, but it was to a considerable extent true that many an illiterate and immoral woman had made her way on to the stage. Though she added considerable glamour to the stage, she had become instrumental in the fall of many a promising professional troupe both in North Karnatak and in Mysore. She could be easily lured by rival companies with a higher remuneration, and on such occasions, she seemed to have no scruples. For quite some time it was not the merit of the play nor the dignity of showmanship that counted to make the play popular, but the number of girls that took part in it. Thus, if not for the sake of morality, for the preservation of the theatrical art itself, and in order to bring about a correct perspective of the theatre, the cry rightly went up to ban the woman from the stage. The rational element of the argument expressed itself in the appeal for wives to act along with their husbands, an appeal for the educated men and women to take to the stage. The

1. 'ಸ್ತ್ರೀಯು ಪುರುಷವೇಷದಲ್ಲಿ ಅನ್ಯರ ಕಣ್ಣಿಗೆ ಹೇಗೆ ರಂಜಿಸಲಾರಳೋ ಹಾಗೆಯೇ ಸ್ತ್ರೀ ವೇಷವನ್ನು ಧರಿಸುವ ಗಂಡಸೂ ಅರ್ಧ ಪ್ರಪಂಚಕ್ಕೆ ಅಸಮಾಧಾನವನ್ನು ಕಲ್ಪಿಸುವನು. ಸ್ತ್ರೀ ಪಾತ್ರವನ್ನು ಸ್ತ್ರೀಯೇ ವಹಿಸಿ ನಿರ್ದುಹಿಸುವಷ್ಟು ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿ ಯಾವ ಪುರುಷನೂ ನೆರವೇರಿಸಲಾರನೆಂಬುದನ್ನು ಸ್ತ್ರೀಪುರುಷರ ಪ್ರಕೃತಿಭೇದದಿಂದಲೇ ತಿಳಿಯಬಹುದು.

ಕನಕಲಕ್ಷ್ಮಮ್ಮ — ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ ಜನವರಿ ೧೯೨೮ ಪುಟ ೭೮.

2. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya; *Rangabhoomi*; Feb., 1928. p. 84.

3. 'Vikramorvasiya'.

4. R. K. Yajnik; *The Indian Theatre*. p. 123.

dawn of new reason brought its bright and warm light, and from the thirties of this century, many an example of an actor marrying an actress could be cited. The number of women-artists steadily increased on the professional stage and some of the talented artists like *K. Aswathamma* (Bharata Janollasini Sabha and later, Gubbi Company), *Tripuramba* (Gubbi Company), *Lahshmibai* (Sahitya Samrajya Nataka Mandali), *M. V. Rājamma* (Chandrakala Nataka Mandali of Peer), *B. Jayamma* (Gubbi Company), *Gangubai Guledgudd* (Viswa Gunādarsha Mandali of Vamanarao Master), *Ballari Laliia* (Mitramandali of Hirannayya), *Sundaramma* (Chamundeshwari Company) added grace and charm to the professional stage by their exquisite performances. Apart from the women's troupes as that of Lakshmeshwar (Stree Nataka Mandali) actresses like *Gangubai Guledgudda* of North Karnatak, Nanjāsani of Bangalore and Kama-lamma and Lakshmasani of Mysore founded and led their own professional troupes. With the increase of the liberty of the individual in the field of art—as in other fields, the society gradually lost both the right and interest to question the artist of his or her 'morality' and the controversy that raised a dust-storm in the twenties, no more existed after 1935.

#### A FALL:

In spite of experiments and periodical success the professional stage of Karnatak seems to have taken a downward curve in the Thirties. Causes for the decline could be grouped under external influences and internal weaknesses. The most formidable of the external influences was the advent of the 'talkie' film which became an overpowering competitor with the stage which had remained for decades, the single medium of entertainment in cities. The film came at a time when the people had started measuring their money's worth. They naturally patronised it as a cheaper mode of a more colourful entertainment. Play-houses got converted into film-houses. Reputed artists gave up the stage in favour of the screen, as it paid them better and assured them of a steadier life and wider popularity. The stage gradually receded from the cities and tried to find its moorings in villages, but even there, it soon came to be displaced by the touring talkies. Excepting a few of the well-to-do concerns like the Gubbis, the S. S. S. Nataka Mandali of M. V. S. Naidu, Kumāreshwara Kripā Pōṣita Nataka Sangha of Chittaragi, Kalā Vaibhava Nātya Sangha of Enigi Balappa, and Shārada Sangeeta Nataka Mandali of Gokak which could still

hold on to the stage even after paying the entertainment tax, all the others crumbled down.

The second of the external influences was the steady importance gained by the amateur stage which stood as a serious competitor with its 'intellectual' plays and a refined method of production. It was the gift of a true spirit of renaissance that came up in the Thirties. Amateur Stage—'the stage of the intelligentsia' gave a rude shake-up to the professional stage, its themes, plot construction and its productions and made it pick up social subjects for the sake of survival. But when the professional troupes receded to the villages, being unable to bear the shocks of the film and the amateur stage in the cities, they found that social plays were not received with as much relish as the mythological ones. The professional troupe had to toss between the city and the village with social and mythological plays alternately. It struggled to survive without any scope for compromise.

Possibly even more than the external influences, its own internal causes and conflict forced the professional stage into an untimely decline. The professional stage never reacted quickly to the changing times and tastes. It usually repeated the same old hackneyed plays for years at length. The artist was always disgruntled, for, excepting the leading and economically sound troupes, others did not pay him properly and regularly, and so, he always thought of breaking out and opening his own troupe. The allegiance of the artist was naturally undependable. Like the Spartan soldier, he would easily be tempted to join the rival troupe with a slightly better material advantage. The general complaint that the professional stage remained only as the last resort to persons "who were unfit for anything better", was full of significance.<sup>1</sup> The stage was considered to be the easiest profession one could take to, and it is this notion that proved the real bane in the path of progress and prosperity. All these factors were naturally interconnected and moved in a vicious circle, each acting and reacting on the other, and all together, contributing to the decline of the commercial stage.

#### AN ESTIMATE OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAGE:

This broad and rapid survey of the professional stage of Karnatak would suggest that in spite of its blemishes and excesses, it did fulfil a good deal of its purpose to a considerable extent, by remaining a potential institution of art. It made a contribution—considerable both

1. ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯು ಹಸಿದವನ ಹಳಸಿದ ಹಿಟ್ಟಾಗಿದೆ.

A. N. Krishnarao; *Rangabhoomi*. Dec., 1925. p. 102.

in merit and volume—to the Kannada dramatic literature. As a powerful medium of art and culture of the Kannada country, it grew into a lofty stature and taught its patterns to other provincial theatres. It produced quite a few playwrights and stage artists of great skill, some of whom like Varadachar, could be counted among the best of the stage artists in any country. While still in prosperity, the professional theatre met its decline as it proved to be too rigid for the changing tastes; but surely, by no means had it outlived its utility.

Even to-day, the people are enthusiastic and sympathetic to the professional stage whenever a play is announced in a busy town. Such instances are not rare, for, a town like Hubli provides crowded houses to a play like the outmoded *Karukshetra* even to-day. This is an evidence of the popular sympathy to the professional stage even in the age of the three dimensional films. It is in this sympathy, the hope for the future of the stage rests. There is something mechanical and monotonous all the time about the shadows of the screen, while there is a direct touch of nature on the stage. The difference is as between the musical performance of a creative artist and a gramophone record. If not for anything else, it is for the sake of this direct contact and intimacy between the artist and the audience, the theatre needs to be preserved. The preservation could be achieved, and its future assured, essentially by the professional stage where the artist devotes his life to the art of the theatre. Its preservation is possible when the society creates better conditions for the professional artist. Professional troupes also need a consolidation for their own resurrection. They would have to feel the pulse of the times and serve the society, not like a slave but as an enlightened friend. They will have to avail themselves of modern amenities of the western stage in the interest of more convincing productions. All this calls for a co-operation between the society and the artist, which when achieved, the theatre can still live and grow again as the Peoples' University. National Independence seems to have brought a growing awareness of the duty of the country to its theatre. If the awareness results in consolidated action, leading to the resurrection of the professional theatre on stable foundations, the society would regain a great institution of art, for its own pleasure and profit.

## VI

### THE AMATEUR STAGE

The amateur stage is hardly a century old in India. Its birth in the Kannada speaking land about four decades ago, seems to have been the result of three fundamental factors that acted and re-acted against one another and disturbed the all-pervading unhealthy apathy of those days to provide new thoughts and approaches in regard to theatrical progress. These factors were the excesses of the professional stage, the influence of a study of the West, and finally, the new impact of modern times.

To the intelligentsia, many an aspect of the professional performances appeared crude and primitive when looked from western standards. Professional excesses came to be ridiculed by leading writers of the Amateur stage. Plays like *Nam Kampani* of Kailasam, *Nātakavemba Nātika* of Karanth and *Sampust Rāmāyana* of Sriranga caricatured the oddities and excesses of the professional stage to which modern mind could not reconcile itself, and thereby provided hilarious fun. The situation was in a way similar to the one prevailing in Russia before the advent of the Moscow Art Theatre and the protest was similar in nature. It was a protest against —

“ the customary manner of acting, against theatricality, against bathos, against declamation, against over-acting, against bad manner of production, against the habitual scenery, against the star system which spoiled the ensemble, against the light and farcial repertoire . . . ”.<sup>1</sup>

In Karnatak, the protest was directed most forcefully against the themes of professional plays, their stage-music and odd settings, scenery and presentation. The professional theatre could no longer serve a particular section of society which was fast changing its tastes owing to the inevitable influence of the West.

A study of the methods of Western stage added to the growing unrest. All the old standards came to be questioned. The new age, consequently, imbibed a pronounced enthusiasm for experiment. Financial success and artistic merit came to be viewed in their proper perspective. Respect for traditions and customs dwindled fast. Mythological and historical themes soon lost their hold. It was considered,

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1. Stanislavsky. Quoted by R. K. Yajnik. *The Indian Theatre*. P. 240.

not wrongly after all, that the pre-occupation of the professional stage, with its eye on financial success, inevitably led it to seek the satisfaction of the majority of its audience whose tastes were by no means of a high order. The Amateur Stage was born out of an attempt to extricate the stage from the grip of commercialism and to endow it with dignity and self-respect. It created a new awareness of the true functions of drama, its need to expose, interpret, criticise and guide the society. Inspired as it had been by the theatre of the West, it had to face the powerful opposition of the conservatives,<sup>1</sup> but it was soon clear that the conservatives were fighting a losing battle.

The Professional Stage lost on another count also. Its plays were too long, in addition to being long-winded. People did not have as much time now to waste as they had years ago, when life moved at a slow rural pace. The Professional stage did not appreciate this change in audience attitude, demanding for plays which said all they had to say in reasonable time. The Amateur stage was able to meet this demand easily. Its actors too could not give the stage more than a part of their time. The stage could not be anything more than a hobby to them, for they were all drawn from the educated middle class and depended for their livelihood on the 'more respectable' jobs; but yet this was the only means of artistic self-expression open to most of them. Naturally, they brought to the amateur stage a rare passion for intelligent acting and a desire for experiment. Thus, the dissatisfaction with the conditions obtaining in the professional theatre, the new vistas opened by a study of the Western theatre and drama, and the urge for artistic self-expression through the stage felt by intelligent men and women, combined to create a new mode of the theatre in Karnatak—the Amateur Stage—which, perhaps unlike the old-time professional stage, had the vital strength to co-exist with the cinema.

The new stage laid great emphasis on a rational and realistic approach to its themes. The amateur play was essentially a prose work devoid of the colour, costumes, settings and music of professional drama. It sought to entertain the educated middle classes which had spurned the professional drama. It was intellectual and often symbolic: and its length was kept within the limits of reason, for its audieces

1. ಧರ್ಮಾಂಧತೆ, ಶ್ರದ್ಧಾವಾಸ್ಯೆ, ಸಂಪ್ರದಾಯಶೃಂಖಲೆ ಮತ್ತು ಮೌಢ್ಯದಿಂದ ಬಳಲುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ನಾಡಿನಲ್ಲಿ ( ಇಂಗ್ಲಿಷ್ ಶಿಕ್ಷಣದ ) ಹೊಸ ಬೆಳಕಿನ ಹೊಂಬಿಸಿಲು ಕಂಡೊಡನೆ ಕಣ್ಣು ಕುಕ್ಕಿದವು ಕೆಲವರಿಗೆ .... ಅಪರಿಚಿತನಾದ ರೂಢಿಗಳ ಅರಂಭವು ಆಕ್ರೋಶವನ್ನುಂಟುಮಾಡಿತು—ಕೆಲವರಲ್ಲಿ. — ಮಾನ್ಯ ನರಸಿಂಹರಾವ್ : ' ಹೊಸಗನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕಗಳು ' : ಪ್ರಬುದ್ಧ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ, ಬೆಳ್ಳಿಯ ಸಂಚಿಕೆ ೧೯೪೫ - ಪುಟ ೧೦೧

were urban. The artists were educated, the stage to them was a hobby. They had a keen desire for experimentation in themes, forms and presentation, and they aimed at reforming and improving the taste of their spectators. They did succeed to a considerable degree in their efforts, for, unlike the professional stage, the amateur theatre was no bond slave of the box-office.

The amateur troupes concentrated on a simplicity in visual presentation and restraint in the use of words and voice. They tried to bring a new thoughtfulness into the theatre so that it could seek to become the critic and mentor of society and the means of working a revolution in the ideas of men. While the professional stage invariably emphasised spectacle, the amateur play stressed the intellectual interpretation of social problems. It is true that the amateur play came to be criticised as being very light-hearted and as woefully lacking in certain 'essentials' of the drama—like dance, music and acting; but it should be admitted that with its coming, intelligence and originality found a place in the theatre: good taste began to prevail here and there.

#### MANIFESTATIONS:

The gift of the amateur stage to the dramatic literature of modern Kannada is both bountiful and varied. But for an occasional interpretation or a parody, it almost completely discarded the once supreme mythological and even historical themes. The emphasis was now placed on social themes. It evolved the one-act play: the total number of one-act plays written during the first four decades perhaps exceeded three hundred at least.<sup>1</sup> Successful experiments brought in new themes and also new forms like the Impromptu play, the Opera, the Dream play, Mime, Fantasy, the Shadow play and the Radio play. As a result, the Amateur theatre established itself as a significant part of the artistic life of towns, and also helped to substitute, enrich and strengthen a decadent professional stage.

A number of amateur troupes maintained regular rolls of members, actors and patrons. They also toured the Kannada country like professional troupes. Some of them like the famed *Amateur Dramatic Association* and *Chāya Artists* of Bangalore and *Kalōpāsak Mandal* of Dharwar went far from their home-towns to visit different parts of India. Such amateur troupes sprang up in every important town of Karnatak during the last three decades, though not all of them lived

1. In 1941, the total number of Kannada One-act plays estimated to be more than two hundred.

M. V. Sitaramaih : *Kannada Ekāṅka Nāṭaka : Sambhāvaṇe*, 1941, P. 446.

long. A number of troupes grew up in association of Karnatak Sanghs, colleges and other social, literary and educational institutions. The Stage-play soon became an inevitable item in the programme of almost every social gathering, festival and conference. 'Drama Conferences' became a part of the Annual Literary Conferences of *Kannada Sāhitya Sammēlana*, wherein, problems connected with the stage were discussed. The amateur stage steadily gained experience, self-confidence and some degree of financial stability. Strictly speaking, it is only groups of amateur artists with rolls of regular membership of artists and patrons that should be considered as the true backbone of the Amateur Theatre. A peep into the history of a few representative amateur troupes would reveal their qualities and status. It would also indicate the amazing variety of themes and forms which the modern Kannada playwright created for the amateur stage to produce.

#### AMATEUR TROUPES:

*North Karnatak*: The seeds of the amateur stage of North Karnatak seem to have been sown by *Prāchya Kreedu Samyardhana Mandali* of Madihāl, a suburb of Dharwar. It had become a custom with the Mandali by the year 1899 to stage a mythological drama on the occasion of its Annual Ganapati festival. Soon, the Mandali relieved the performance of its religious colour and gave it a secular, cultural and social status. The performance came to be repeated more often. Experience gained during these performances gave the promoters of the Mandali the necessary self-confidence, and they established, on the initiative of Mudavidu Krishna Rao who was inspired by the Badami Amateurs,<sup>1</sup> a 'regular' troupe in 1904 and called it the *Bhārata Kalottējaka Sangeeta Samāja*. The new troupe staged in two instalments, Churamuri's *Shākuntala*, in 1905. Later, it staged *Saubhadra* and *Rāmarājya Viyoga*, both translated from Marathi by Mudavidu, now the guiding star of the troupe. *Mricchakatika* followed these and brought unstinted encouragement and patronage from the elite of Dharwar. Deshpande Tirumala Rao who came from a family of reputed musicians of Dharwar played leading roles in all the plays and remained the pivot of the troupe. Vaidya Subbanna,

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1. A few musicians of Badami had joined together to form an amateur troupe under the leadership of Mugali Srinivasa Rao, a local Vakil, and staged the *Shākuntala* of Churamuri not only in Badami but in Bagalkot and Bijapur also. The Badami troupe inspired Mudavidu to initiate the *Samāja* of Madihāl. Mudavidu's introduction to Churamuri's *Shākuntala Nataka* (1934) pp. 31-32.

Avadhāni-Timmannāchārya, Sambal Veerappa and Madanbhāvi Venkat-arāma came to be known as actors of out-standing abilities. Many of the artists of this troupe were employed in the Railway Offices at Dharwar. And when the Railway Head Quarters were shifted to Madras, most of these had to leave Dharwar. This rendered a death-blow to the Association which could never find its feet again inspite of the best efforts of Deshpande Tirumalarao and Mudavidu Krishna Rao.

The Association flourished just for about a decade and staged quite a few full-length stage-plays, mostly drawn from the Marathi dramatic literature. The presentation is said to have contained quite a few flaws of the professional stage with regard to the endless number of songs and 'crude' acting. But it must be said to the credit of this troupe that it was responsible in inspiring many more amateur troupes to come into being in North Karnatak. Scores of them sprang up and tried to follow the footsteps of the *Bharata Kalottējaka Sangeeta Samāja*; quite a few of them died a premature death, but a handful of them could be reckoned to have done yeoman service to the theatre. Only a few of them lived long and well. Among them, mention may be made of the *Youngmen's Football Club Amateurs* of Gadag, the *Vāsudeva Amateurs* of Bagalkot, the *Bhārat Sēvak Samāj* of Bijapur and the *Karnatak College Amateurs*, *Kannada Nāṭya Vilāsīgala Sangha* and the *Kalōpāsak Mandal* of Dharwar. An examination of the working of these troupes, their writers and plays, their artists and showmanship will reveal the fact that each one of them owed a good deal of its strength and reputation to a particular play wright with whom each of them associated itself in order to get his plays and guidance.

It is significant that the city of Gadag which sponsored the very first professional troupe of North Karnatak—the acclaimed *Kṛtapura Nāṭaka Mandali* of Śāntakavi—gave also the first successful amateur troupe, the *Youngmen's Football Club Amateurs*. This troupe was the outcome of the influence of the *Bhārat Kalottejaka Sangeeta Samāja* of Madihal. The troupe worked under the inspiration and guidance of Sri Narayana Rao Huilgol, who, with an unerring understanding of the secret of the success of the Marathi stage, wrote plays on realistic *social* themes. He dispensed with the hackneyed pauranic subjects except for a new interpretation and a timely patriotic purpose as in *Bhārata Sandhāna*. Shri Narayana Rao paved the way for more modern methods in showmanship and also for new social themes in spite of the fact that the setting of his plays was traditional. He proved to be the first pro-

gressive among the conservative playwrights and his plays, as staged by the Gadag Amateurs, remained popular for many years.

The Gadag Amateurs invariably staged a new play a year. Between the years 1916 and 1925, the troupe staged several plays of Narayana Rao including *Premārjun*, *Kanakavilāsa*, *Vajramukuta*, *Kumāra Rāma*, *Vidyāranya*, *Bhārata Sandhāna*, *Stree Dharma Rahasya* and *Patitōddhāra*. His later plays including *Stree Dharma Rahasya* became very popular and attracted the attention as a progressive play in the cause of emancipation of woman to an equal status with man. Narayana Rao preached moderation in accepting the new and discarding the old ideas. *Bhārata Sandhāna*, written at the time of the Home Rule Movement launched by the great Bala Gangadhar Tilak, was in the guise of mythology, but pleaded the cause of India and her right to free herself from the foreign yoke. Khadilkar's Marathi play *Sairandhri* came to be penalised by the Government for advocating the same cause, but strangely enough, *Bhārata Sandhāna* escaped the attention of the Government in spite of its rather glaring patriotic purposiveness. The Gadag amateurs earned a name for their impressive performances. They visited important towns in North Karnatak and donated their profits to social and educational causes. The Vidyādāna Samiti High School of Gadag is a living monument to the high ideals which inspired the troupe.

The Bagalkot amateurs came into being in January 1927 under the title *Vāsudeva Vinodini Sabha*, named after Sri Kerur Vasudevacharya, a noted playwright, novelist, short-story writer and journalist of North Karnatak. Kerur, like his predecessors, Gunderao Churamuri and Gadigayya Honnapurmāth, had translated into Kannada, well-known plays from English. Some of the well-known adaptations of Kerur are *Vasantayāmini Swapna Chamatkāra* (The Mid-Summer Night's Dream), *Suratanagarada Śreṣṭhi* (The Merchant of Venice), *Rameśa Lalita* (Romeo and Juliet) and *Patī Vāśikarāṇa* (She stoops to Conquer). Though their language is colloquial, these adaptations, we must agree, are most competently done. *Vāsudeva Vinodini Sabhā* started with plays written by Kerur, and later, took to staging plays of other representative writers of North Karnatak, particularly those of *Sriranga*. A report of the Amateur Association, issued in 1953, on the occasion of its Silver Jubilee celebrations says that the Association, since its inception, staged '95 longer dramas and 132 one-act plays in different parts of Karnatak.' It specialised in staging prose-plays. The troupe remained a training ground for young aspirants and though not very active during the recent few years as evidenced by the report, it

has a promising future not only because of the financial aid extended to it by the Government on account of its achievement in the past, but also because of the talented artists like C. S. Bennur, Mangalavede and S. H. Parvati who are working for it now.

The Karnatak College of Dharwar built up a band of talented artists consisting of students and members of the staff. It staged from the Twenties, many impressive plays starting with *Tālikote* of Masti, *Suratanagarada Srestī* of Kerur and *Stree Dharma Rahasya* of Huilgol. The troupe could hardly consolidate itself owing to the continual change in its student-artists, and yet on the occasion of the annual gathering of the college it always managed to put up an excellent show. With the entrance of R. V. Jagirdar (*Sriranga*) as a member of the staff, there was a great spurt of dramatic activity and the group staged a series of one-act plays, written by him. Even to-day, the student-amateurs of the Karnatak College seem to stand on safe ground. Their chief advantage is a most receptive, sympathetic and yet quite critical audience. Their recent performances of *Huttadalli Huttā* (by Kailasam) and *Eccamanāyaka* (by Garud Sadāśivrao) proved that these student-amateurs have a great future if only their talent is harnessed in a suitable manner.

The *Kannada Nāṭya Vilāsigala Sangha* and the *Kalōpāsak Mandal*, both from Dharwar are among the well-established amateur troupes of North Karnatak. The former was started about twenty years ago by Sriranga the noted playwright who wrote for the troupe. It specialised in prose-plays and visited Poona, Bombay, Bangalore and Hyderabad in addition to paying more frequent visits to important centres in North Karnatak. It successfully toured the Kannada country and collected money for the Sixcentenary Celebrations of Vijayanagar. The troupe has not been quite active in the recent ten years, and yet when it put on boards the symbolic play *Shoka Chakra* of Sriranga, it at once gave a glimpse of both its inherent histrionic talent and a good understanding of the technique of simple but impressive showmanship. The *Kalōpāsak Mandal* of Dharwar, started in 1943, made a good mark by staging plays like *Uddhāra* and *Hosa Samsāra* (both by D. R. Bendre), *Bhāgyashree* and *Parivartana* (L. J. Bendre) and *Patitoddhāra* and *Bhārata Sandhāna* (Narayanarao Huilgol). With a band of educated and talented artists drawn from Dharwar, Gadag and Bagalkot, the Mandal has staged plays in important cities of North Karnatak and Maharashtra including Poona and Bombay. The Mandal has also staged musical plays directed by a versatile artist like Bhimsen Joshi.

With new colleges coming up at Belgaum, Bijapur, Bagalkot and Hubli, more amateur groups have sprung up. Apart from these, every important city in North Karnatak has its own amateur troupes which strive to continue the tradition of our theatre; and new troupes are always springing up inspired to work by a distinguished artist or playwright. *The Kannada Kalōddhāraka Sangha* led by Srinivas Havnur is an example to cite, for it took up plays of D. G. Kulkarni, a young and promising playwright of Dharwar and put up impressive shows. *The Stage Unit of All India Radio* provided yet another example in Dharwar of the rich talent available for the Kannada amateur stage. The real hope for or the amateur stage of North Karnatak seems to be centered more in these amateur associations than in the college troupes.

#### MYSORE:

Perhaps the oldest and undoubtedly the most influential of the amateur troupes of the old Mysore state was the *Amateur Dramatic Association* (A. D. A.) which came into being 1909 owing to the enthusiastic efforts of some talented lawyers, teachers and merchants of Bangalore. The Association sought to follow the footsteps of the famous *Suguna Vilāsa Sabhā* of Madras, "the premier amateur dramatic association of South India,"<sup>1</sup> and did succeed in standing on an equal footing with established professional companies like the *Ratnāvali* troupe of Varadachar and the *Chāmarā'endra Karnāṭak Nāṭak Sabhā* patronised by the Mysore palace. Thanks to the labours of some enthusiastic workers, the paying membership of the troupe steadily expanded, placing the Association on a firm financial footing. The A.D.A. sponsored Drama Competitions offering prizes to the best of plays received. In 1919, Kailasam, 'the Father of the Modern Kannada Drama' wrote out his first play *Tollu-Gatti* for the competition and was awarded the first prize. The credit of discovering one of the greatest of modern playwrights thus goes to the A.D.A. The Association also staged its prize-winning plays after long and careful rehearsals. The success of the troupe in various centres of Andhra, Hyderabad and Mysore earned a great reputation for it and later brought continuous and munificent patronage from the Mysore palace, particularly after Yuvarāja Kantirava Narasarāja Wodeyar became a patron of the Association.

1. Kannada plays also were being staged under the auspices of *Suguna Vilāsa Sabhā*, thanks to the efforts of the late Sri Benagal Rama Rao who was the Oriental Translator to the Madras Government. Sri Rama Rao was himself a playwright and actor.

T. Raghavachari of Bellary, one of the most brilliant of the stage-artists of Karnatak and Andhra was the luminary of the Association. Under his leadership, selected members of the association took frequent 'weak-end-trips' to near-about cities and often to Bellary and Madras to stage plays in Kannada, Telugu, Hindi and English.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1931, a select band of artists went on a short tour of North India under the leadership of T. Raghavachari,

"visiting Bombay, Simla and Calcutta and giving three or four of their masterpieces in Hindi, Telugu and English in each centre.... On the whole the tour was a distinct artistic triumph<sup>2</sup> and the Amateurs came with flying colours from the critical and discerning theatre-goers of North India."<sup>3</sup>

The Association got plays written by Masti Venkatesha Iyengar (*Tālikote, Shānta*), C. K. Venkataramiah (*Mandōdari, Nachikēta*), Pandit Taranath (*Deenabandhu Kabīr*), Bellāve Narahari Śāstri, Sosale Garalapuri Śāstri, A. N. Krishnarao and Kailasam. Apart from T. Raghavachari, the Association could boast of a galaxy of brilliant artists like K. Bhimasenarao, who played the main roles opposite to Raghavachari, K. S. Vasudevarao who portrayed the heroine with distinction, the irresistible Naidu brothers, the talented M. L. Srinivasa Śāstri

1. Annual Report of the A.D.A.—1931.

2. The Press of Bengal paid a great tribute to the Bangalore troupe:

*The Statesman*, 17-5-31: "The Bangalore A. D. A. gave one more illustration of their versatility by giving a Hindi rendering of the *Kabīr* at the Alfred Theatre last night. Every available seat was booked and in response to the public demand, the company has decided to repeat the performance."

*Liberty*, 18-5-31: "Mr. T. Raghavachari and his Company opened their plays to the Calcutta public with *Othello* on Friday. It was surprising how flawlessly the artists spoke English.... *Kabīr* in Hindi and *Ramdas* in Telugu were staged on Saturday and Sunday. Language was no bar, for real art like love and tear, has only one language. It is expected the next two days will draw crowded houses as on previous days."

*The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 16-5-31: "The Bangalore A. D. A. opened their short season in Calcutta yesterday by staging *Othello* at the Alfred Theatre. It was a bold but entirely successful attempt on the part of a company of Indian players to give an interpretation in English of one of Shakespeare's immortal characters."

*The Advance*, 17-5-31: "Following on their wonderfully successful presentation of *Othello* in English last Friday, the gifted company of Amateurs presented an operetta in Hindi entitled *Deenabandhu Kabīr* last night. The versatility and talent of the company is extraordinary...."

3. Dr. K. Kunhi Kannan—'Notes and Comments' *Theatre*: August, 1931, P. 153.

and B. Muddu Krishna. A little later, the Association had the honour to have Devudu Narasimha Śāstri, Motganhalli Subrahmanya Śāstri, Kanakalaxmamma, Annapoorna, Padmavati and other talented artists on its rolls.

The Association published a bright Kannada Monthly—the illustrated *Rangabhoomi*—edited by D. K. Bharadwaj. Later, it came forward with an English quarterly entitled *Theatre* edited by Sri V. Bhaskaran who was assisted by G. Venkatachalam and K. Sampathgirirao. *Theatre* was the first magazine of its kind in India, ‘devoted mainly to an authentic interpretation towards a correct understanding of the renaissance of the Indian dramatic art in all its manifold expression and grandeur.’ The Association steadily built up a good library and by 1931, it was receiving 47 journals and newspapers in exchange for *Rangabhoomi*, the Kannada monthly issued by the Association. In addition, the Association conducted a Music class, weekly Reading classes and discussions on subjects connected with the theatre. Public lectures were frequently arranged. The Association registered itself formally, regularly elected its office bearers, published its detailed annual reports—a rarity then,—distributed printed synopsis of the play among the audiences whenever it staged a play. Two Art-Festivals and a Drama Conference came to be organised by the Association and these celebrations attracted critics, playwrights and actors from all over India. The Art Festival of 1919 was inaugurated by Rabindranath Tagore. The All India Dramatic Conference was presided over by Sarojini Naidu. Scholars like C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, Dr. and Mrs. Cousins and Dr. C. R. Reddi took part in the deliberations of the conference. Mahatma Gandhi witnessed the performance of *Deenabandhu Kabir* in Hindi (written by Taranath) on 19th July, 1927. and expressed great satisfaction with the performance and the laudable work done by the A. D. A. He also wrote a short introduction to the play.

T. Raghavachari died in 1946. This was a grievous blow from which the Association never recovered. The great service rendered by the Association to the Kannada stage for about three decades made it an established symbol of the ideals of the Amateur theatre of Karnatak. The Association was in a way, entirely responsible for making the people theatre-minded and elevating the stage to a position of honour. It brought about a new awakening among the people with its Play-competitions, Art Festivals and Dramatic Conferences, in which artists, playwrights and critics were brought together to discuss issues connected with the stage. It earned for the theatrical art of Karnatak a great

reputation in other regions of the country and it preserved the story of the contemporary stage of Karnatak in the columns of *Rangabhoomi* and the *Theatre*, a story that is assuming the position of history, so far as the land's theatre is concerned.

#### THE L. D. A.

The Literary and Dramatic Association of Mysore came into being in 1919. It closely followed the A. D. A. of Bangalore in the aims it set before itself and in its working methods. Sri D. Lakshmanayya, a well-known character-actor of Mysore, was the soul of the Association which was later joined by C. R. Subba Rao and C. Anandarao. Anandarao was highly popular in his times for his humorous roles. Thanks to his reputation, the membership of the L. D. A. grew to eighty. Starting with the available mythological plays, the Association did well in its performances of *Nindā Śāle* (an adaptation by Lakṣmanayya of *The School for Scandal*), *Vidyāranya* and *Lava Kuśa*, but could not earn sufficient money to ensure its stability. Difference of opinion also arose among its members, and it came to a close in 1938. It was revived again in 1941 as the *Mysore Nataka Sangha*, guided by the noted playwright Nanjangud Śrikanta Śāstri. Plays like *Ahalyābāi* (historical), *Rāni Dēvaldēvi* (historical) and *Samāja Sandhye* (social) were staged with success. The Association organised dramatic competitions in Mysore in the years 1943 and 1944, inviting all the amateur troupes of Mysore to stage their best plays. This effort brought together leading amateur troupes of the time like 'Sri Saraswati Sangha,' 'Mayura Artists', 'Vasanta Institute Amateurs', 'Students' Dramatic Association', 'K. R. Mills Amateurs', 'Karnatak Samaja Seva Sangha' and the 'Ittigegud Amateurs.' In spite of the ceaseless efforts of enthusiasts like N. Srikanta Sastri and C. Anandrao, the Association did not get sufficient material encouragement, and soon after the competitions in 1944, it went out of existence.

#### CHAYA ARTISTS:

The Chāya Artists of Bangalore mark an era in the Amateur dramatic movement. The troupe blossomed out of the dramatic traditions fostered by the 'Old Boys Association' of the National School of Bangalore and the Malleswaram Dramatic Association. The two wings joined together in 1937 under the name *Karnatak Hindi Amateurs* and made an extensive effort to popularise Hindi and also to provide good dramatic entertainment to a little circle of friends and families. In 1943, the troupe assumed the title 'Chaya Artists' under the leader-

ship of the talented and enthusiastic B. S. Venkatram and his brothers. The Chaya Artists soon became the leading amateur troupe of Mysore State with a band of excellent artists including K. Gururaja kao, A. Rama Rao Murthy and the 'Sham' triumverates. It earned an enviable reputation for itself staging the plays of Kailasam. In later years it put on boards the social plays of Parvatavani, one of the leading writers for the amateur stage. Its performances of *Bahaddūr Ganda* and *Undādi Gunda* became a byword for the best in the amateur stage.

"It may be mentioned that this is the only amateur unit which staged 120 consecutive shows in Bangalore of Parvatavani's *Bahaddūr Ganda* to capacity houses." <sup>1</sup>

The troupe was hailed as 'the best of talented amateurs in the field of theatrical art'; it became an effective training-ground for young and enthusiastic aspirants and travelled extensively in the Mysore State, making available the proceeds of its performances to various deserving causes. Though rather inactive in recent years, the Chaya Artists can be proud of their lasting contribution to the Kannada stage. They are now busy under the guidance of Sri Venkataram in establishing an 'Arts Academy' in Bangalore with the aid of the State Government.<sup>2</sup>

Mention may also be made of the *Varadachar Memorial Association* which began in 1924 at the initiative of some disciples and admirers of A. V. Varadachar. It undertook an extensive tour in the Kannada Country in order to collect funds for the establishment of a theatre in Bengalore in memory of the great dramatic genius. The troupe was headed by Kanakalaxamma and R. Nagendra Rao. The plays were 'professiona' in nature but the spirit was typical of the amateurs. The Association visited Bombay, Poona and other distant cities and collected money. It is now reported that the aim of founding the Varadachar Memorial Theatre is being pursued.

*The United Artists* of Bangalore under the leadership of C. K. Nagarajrao and Chi. Sadashivaiah have proved to be a very impressive amateur troupe particularly with their impromptu plays. Ravi Artists have made significant progress. *The Sugar Town Amateurs* of Mandya has a number of talented artists as revealed by their performances of *Unḍādi Gunda*, *Viparyāsa*, *Āṣāḍhabhūti*, *Bhakta Dāmāji Pant*, and *Daulat*. This troupe has inspired amateur dramatic associations of

1. A brief Introduction to the Chāya Artists (mss.)

2. It is a matter of regret to theatre-lovers that the Chaya Artists have gone defunct since the above was written. B. S. Narayana Rao a leader of the old Chaya Artists is now the moving spirit behind 'Ravi Artists' a band of young and talented artists of Bangalore.

workers in factories, the prominent among them being the Amateurs of the Krishnarajendra Mills, Mysore.

#### BELLARY AND MANGALORE:

Bellary and Mangalore made a contribution to the amateur theatre, Bellary by building up a tradition of the amateur stage and Mangalore by trying a number of theatrical experiments under the guidance of K. S. Karanth. Mudavidu Krishnarao recalls the names of talented amateur playwrights-cum-actors of Bellary like Bellary Venkatacharya, Tulasi Ramacharya of Adoni, Bellary Basappa and Bhattappa who earned much fame 'as recently as 60-65 years ago.'<sup>1</sup> Later, *Sarasa Vinodini Nāṭaka Sabhā*, an amateur association started by the famed D. Krishnamacharlu of Bellary early in the eighties, staged its first plays in Kannada before it switched over to Telugu plays.<sup>2</sup> A number of amateur associations like *The Art Lovers' Association* and *Joladarashi Mitramandali* frequently appeared in Bellary and strove to follow the great traditions of theatrical art established by D. Krishnamacharlu and Bellary Raghavachari.

A study of the careers of some of the amateur troupes will reveal the major drawbacks from which the troupes suffered and which proved to be their undoing many a time. Even very influential and well organised troupes like the A. D. A. the L. D. A., and the Chaya Artists seem to have revolved around individuals. Normally, an amateur troupe, has no reason to fade out after the death or defection of one member, however important he is, for, it is not a proprietary concern working on a one-star one-proprietor sort of system. That amateur's groupings all the same did fade out this way proves that they were in no better position than the professional companies so far as their dependence on a 'star' or two was concerned. A second drawback from which the amateurs suffered was the inevitable transfers of actor-members of the association from one place to another, as happened in the case of the artists of the *Bharata Kalottējaka Sangeeta Samāja*. The worst drawback — inevitable as it is — is perhaps the lack of training and rehearsals, for — unlike as in the professional companies — there is no obligation on the part of the artist, who is educated and who knows that the troupe is helping him in no way, to rehearse rigorously and carefully. More often than not, a member, though a

1- Mudavidu Krishna Rao in a speech delivered in December, 1929. *Rangabhoomi*: February, 1930 p. 100.

2. Ibid.

poor artist was to be given the leading role because he enjoyed a high social status. This lack of propriety and the foolhardy self-confidence that the players exhibited now and then naturally came to be criticised bitterly.<sup>1</sup> The troupes had to realise that acting, like any other art, needed able directors. They needed training in the art of make-up. They needed a willingness to study and emulate the techniques of the West. Many an amateur troupe came into being merely because of the enthusiasm of an individual and soon disappeared for want of stage technique and histrionic ability. It was true that many troupes failed for want of financial stability, but even more than money, they needed faithful, understanding and painstaking artists, who could sacrifice their individual pleasures and conveniences for the sake of the team.

#### THE PLAYWRIGHT:

Playwright is the architect of the amateur stage. It has been he more than the actor and producer that is responsible for shaping the amateur stage and sustaining it, for, the script itself assumes a greater importance here than its portrayal. Production is made subservient to the theme and its realistic development. The professional pomp in play-production is missing on the amateur stage; the importance given to the individual actor and the scope provided for his histrionic talent is much less. The cry that went up for realism in settings, scenery, costumes and acting reduced the amateur's showmanship to utter simplicity. The amateur stage finds no necessity for an elaborate method of make-up, nor does it provide any scope for stage-music, dance, transfer-scenes or for that matter, anything spectacular. Yet the play itself holds the audience. The miracle is performed by the *playwright* with his penetrating analysis of social themes, his sweep of new ideas, his 'intellectual' humour and his simple but effective technique of play-writing itself. It is in this sense, that *he* is the maker of the amateur stage more than the actor and producer. The history of the amateur stage, therefore, is essentially the story of the playwright, his way of thinking and the nature of his contributions.

The Amateur stage inaugurated the age of social drama. Even the occasional mythological and historical plays bear the stamp of the

1. “ನಮ್ಮ ನಾಟ್ಯವಿಲಾಸಿಗಳು ‘ಮುಖ್ಯ ಪಾರ್ಟಿಗೆ ತಾನೊಬ್ಬನೇ ತಕ್ಕವನು— ತನ್ನ ಪಾರ್ಟಿನ ಮಾತುಗಳನ್ನು ನಾಟಕ ಮುಗಿದ ಬಳಿಕ ಕಲಿತರೂ ಸಾಕು’ ಎಂದು ಎಲ್ಲಿಯೂ ತನಕ ತಿಳಿಯುತ್ತಾರೋ ಅಲ್ಲಿಯೂ ತನಕ ನಾಟ್ಯವಿಲಾಸಿಗಳಿಂದ ಬರಿಯ ವಿಲಾಸವನ್ನು ಬಯಸಬಹುದೇ, ವಿನಫ ನಾಟ್ಯವನ್ನಲ್ಲ.” — ಶಿವರಾಮ ಕಾರಂತ  
‘ನಾಟಕಗೋಷ್ಠಿ’ಯ ಅಧ್ಯಕ್ಷ ಭಾಷಣ — ಪರಿಷತ್ಪತ್ರಿಕೆ — ಜಾನೇವರಿ-ಮಾರ್ಚ್ ೧೯೩೯-ಪುಟ ೭೩.

new age. Its speech has come closer to the spoken word, marking a great change from that of the professional stage. The play itself shed some of its time-honoured characters like *Sūtradhāra*, *Nati* and *Vidūṣaka*, finding no real dramatic use for them.<sup>1</sup> A new and agreeable stage of blank verse came to be employed as the vehicle for the dignified themes. The era of the amateur theatre gave a new turn to the Kannada dramatic literature. It became a period of interrogation of time-honoured traditions and experiments in themes and forms. The old type of drama was soon rejected with gusto and the new, heralded with enthusiasm. Plays on a great variety of topics, plays that stung and provoked the audience to a re-evaluation of long accepted attitudes and patterns of behaviour, followed in quick succession. Almost every man of letters, be he a poet, novelist or a short story writer, tried his hand at plays. Kannada drama soon became a force to reckon with. A look into the contributions of leading playwrights of the new era would give a picture of the amateur stage itself, its ideas and achievement.

#### THE NEW PATH:

A leader of the new era was B. M. Srikantiah, one of the great architects of Modern Kannada, a poet, professor, orator and dramatist. His profound scholarship in western dramatic literature and his personal creative talent made him realise the literary poverty of the professional plays of his time. He proceeded to write new plays in Kannada, following the footsteps of the great masters of the west. His *Gadāyudda*, a dramatisation of Ranna's Kannada epic, constructed on the pattern of the Greek tragedies, was accepted by the pundits without a demur,<sup>2</sup> but his *Aśwathāman* brought about a stir. The theme was taken from the *Sauptika Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, but the play very closely resembled the *Ajāx* of Sophocles, the hero of which, like Aśwathāma who murdered the Upa-Pāndavas mistaking them for the Pāndavas themselves, slaughtered home cattle mistaking them for the followers of Odysseus, his rival. The structure of the play was a

1. Exceptions are to be seen in some of the plays of K. V. Puttappa, wherein celestial characters like Yaksha and Yamadoota (In *Yamana Solu*), Kinnara and Yaksha (in *Mahārātri*) and Kali and Dwāpara (in *Smaśāna Kuru-ksetra*) are introduced to provide a beautiful frame-work to the play and also to move it.
2. *Gadāyudda* was staged for the first time in 1925 with that great artist, Prof. N. S. Narayana Śāstri playing the role of Duryodhana. Since then it has been repeatedly performed on the college stage in Mysore and Bangalore.

daring deviation from the established professional methods. What is more, 'B. M. S.' took unprecedented liberties with the great heroes of the Hindu mythology.<sup>1</sup> This greatly shocked the orthodox, who certainly did not hide their displeasure. The work itself, however, was of undeniable greatness, apart from its unorthodoxy:

"The drama itself is unique in its constructional daring and its uncompromising loyalty to higher literary truth and beauty. Orthodox observers are no doubt struck aghast with what appears to them as gross impiety and even impudence. But here is a work of art which challenges close study and demands to be judged on its own merits and with a revised scale of values."<sup>2</sup>

*Aśwathāman* which in the truest sense is *classical*, boldly created a new tradition in Kannada play-writing. Here was a play full of intensity, dignified, moving inevitably to a tremendous climax: it was a triumph of the adaptation of occidental modes to a truly Indian theme. *Pārasīkaru* was another play, a rendering into Kannada of *Persians* of Aeschylus. The theme of the battle of Salamis may have kindled the patriot in Srikantiah, for, he provided in this play, a penetrating vision of the deplorable conditions of a country under foreign domination. Like *Aśwathāman*, *Pārasīkaru* also is intense in effect and has great poetry and power, but it can not easily be staged. It demands a strenuous effort for success on the stage. To the amateur troupes with their limited resources, these plays, in their entirety, were too big an undertaking. They had to content themselves in staging scenes and acts from the plays.

Masti Venkatesha Iyengar and K. V. Puttappa provided the Amateur stage with a new medium—the blank-verse. They dealt mostly with mythological and historical subjects but presented them in beautiful and lucid poetry. The Amateur Dramatic Association of Bangalore staged some of Masti's historical plays like *Tālikote* and *Śiva Chatrapati*; but his legendary plays like *Tirupāni* and *Yaśodhara*, in spite of their immense beauty, rich poetry and dramatic appeal have not yet been staged. Puttappa brought to the Amateur stage great and moving incidents from the epics in his plays like *Yamana Sōlu*, *Vālmīkiya Bhāgya*, *Beralge Koral* and *Śūdra Tapasvi*. The

1. Drona who is believed to have born out of an Urn was made to be the son of Bhārgavi; Ekalavya (a huntsman) was made a cousin of Aśwathāma (a brahmin); Aśwathāma a bachelor in the original was made the father of Rudraśakti, and Krishna is brought down to the level of a mere human being.

2. V. Sitaramiah: *A modern Kannaḍa Drama. Theatre*, 1st March 1931. p 66.

Verse, powerful and resounding as he created high tragedy and re-interpreted mighty characters, could also become direct and beautiful as he portrayed simple faith and love, or the joys and sorrows of the neglected ones of the society. His *Jalagāra*, like Masti's *Tirupāni* dealt with the problem of untouchability and seemed revolutionary to the conservative section of the society as recently as even a decade ago when staged by the Mysore amateurs. His later plays like *Beralge Koral* and *Śūdra Tapasvi* which re-interpreted epic characters and powerfully conveyed a moral for the present, seemed to be far beyond the capacities of the amateur stage.<sup>1</sup> His *Raktākshi* is a grim tragedy in a historical setting, inspired by Shakespeare. It has been staged with success both by amateur and professional troupes. Another playwright of distinction is C. K. Venkataramiah who achieved remarkable success with mythological themes. His brilliant plays *Nachikēta* and *Mandōdārī* were repeatedly performed by the Amateur Dramatic Association of Bangalore and elicited applause of enthusiastic crowds and the praise of intelligent critics.

Many a modern writer wrote on historical themes but the amateur stage did not take well with these. The most impressive of modern playwrights on historical themes was SAMSA (A. N. Swami Venkatādri: 1898-1939). He is reported to have written twenty three full-length plays on different facets of Mysore history, but only six of them are available.<sup>2</sup> Of them, *Vigada Vikramarāya*, *Suguna Gambheera* and *Birudentembara Ganda* have been staged by the student-amateurs of Mysore. These plays with their vigour and dramatic power have, in spite of the many limitations of amateur performance, made a tremendous impression on the audiences. Ajjampur Seshagiri-Rao, a wild genius, an eminent actor himself, wrote operas and plays in blank verse on mythological and historical themes and staged them. *Bēdara Kannappa* and *Kurubana Mōkśa*, devotional plays in lyrics and lofty prose and *Bislādi Chelvi*, a charming social romantic play in music held the amateur stage - but only for a short while. The age was of social drama, and the amateur troupes which were busy staging Kailasam and Sriranga, almost ignored these new experiments and the ones like *Gandu Godali* of G. P. Rajarathnam - in mythological and historical themes. Only a few plays like *Yamana Sōlu* and *Vālmikiyā Bhāgya*

1. "ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಬರುವ ಚಿತ್ರಗಳ ಬೃಹತ್ತನ್ನೂ ಮಹತ್ತನ್ನೂ ಹೊರಗಡೆಯ ಅಲ್ಪ ವೇದಿಕೆಯ ಮೇಲೆ ಕೃತಕಾಭಿನಯದಿಂದ ಪ್ರದರ್ಶಿಸುವುದು ಅಸಾಧ್ಯ."

ಕೆ. ವಿ. ಪುಟ್ಟಪ್ಪ : ಪ್ರಸ್ತಾವನೆ , ಶೂದ್ರತಪಸ್ವಿ'

2. G. P. Rajarathnam: *Samsa Nātaka Chakra*. Jeevana, July 1948.

held the stage because of the small number of roles and the modest stage equipment demanded by them.

#### SOCIAL THEMES:

After the first impetus given by Kerür Vāsudevāchārya and N. K. Huilgol in North Karnatak and by B. M. Shrikantiah in Mysore, scores of new plays were written which proved to be fundamentally different from the professional type, particularly in the choice of the theme and the use of dialogue. Thereafter, the theme selected was more often than not, social and topical: the dialogue was realistic and naturally colloquial. It was the new play — the play of ideas — which did not care for the spectacular that had so long ruled the professional stage.

The earliest available Kannada play of this type is *Iggappa Hegga-deya Vivāha Prahāsana*, written by 'a well-wisher of the Haviks' (possibly by Shri Venkatarama Śāstri of Kirki, North Canara). The play dealt with the topical theme of 'marrying' of young brides to aged 'bridegrooms' in return for a "dowry", an evil custom that prevailed in the coastal area 'particularly among the Haviks, a section of the Brahmin community.' The play was first printed in Bombay in the year 1887: it employed the dialect of the Haviks.<sup>1</sup> There is no evidence of its having been staged anywhere. It is of course improbable that it was ever staged, except in very recent times, for it would undoubtedly have excited the wrath of the all powerful orthodoxy. Many a play written thereafter suffered the same fate as the *Prahāsa*, for orthodoxy was still very powerful and the amateurs did not have the courage to shock them too severely.

The golden age of the amateur stage opened with the contributions of enlightened playwrights like T. P. Kailasam, A. N. Krishna Rao, Sriranga, Śivarama Karanth and D. R. Bendre who bravely carried the fight straight with the enemy's camp. Unmindful of the hostility of the orthodoxy, they criticised and attacked many a deep rooted tradition which was an obvious social evil. In their writings, they achieved a happy harmony between the internal worth of the play and its stage-worthiness, using wit and sarcasm as their chief weapon of social criticism. Kailasam started the new era of bounty in Mysore, Sriranga and

1. The play was reprinted in 1953 by Lingesh Sharma in Kumta. For a play of the last century, it strikes as highly revolutionary, squarely attacking the established system of 'dowry marriages'. The play is gripping and organic in development. It has an effective climax and is a morality-play.

Bendre in North Karnatak and Sivaram Karanth in South Kanara. They paved the path for quite number of younger writers like Ksheerasagara, Kaiwār Rajarao, Rajarathnam, M. N. Kamat, N. K. Kulkarni, L. J. Bendre, Chi Sadaśiviah, Parvatavani and M. N. Babu. Most of them, like Kailasm, Sriranga and Karanth, distinguished themselves as competent stage-artists. Associating themselves with particular amateur groups, they wrote for them, directed them and acted with them. Thus it was not only the new play, but also its writer that inspired and shaped the Amateur theatre—a situation almost unthinkable in the case of professional troupes.

#### T. P. KAILASAM:

Kailasam came on the Kannada literary and dramatic stage in 1919. His play, *Namkampni*, a satire which poured ridicule on the excesses of the professional theatre, was symbolic of his whole work in a way. The old professional stage never really recovered from the blow he dealt to it.<sup>1</sup> Before his advent, the normal language of the drama was stilted and pedantic, the colloquial being almost exclusively reserved for 'Vulgar' situations and characters. Kailasam felt that the professional stage debased pouranic themes; its actors were affected, stilted and hysterical. Kailasam jeered at the professional plays and at the audiences who crowded to see them. Like a true revolutionary, he desired a change from all that was deep rooted and monotonous. The old theatre, with its 'meaningless' mythological plays, its tinsel spectacles and 'transfer scenes', its strutting, ranting and moaning heroes, repelled him. He dismissed it with a supreme gesture and created a new, simpler and more dynamic stage with his own hands. The 'great' hero of old was replaced by an ordinary lower middle-class individual, often a victim of social tyranny or domestic conflict. Kailasam saw drama in every home, an actor in every individual; he saw dramatic possibilities in each aspect of middle-class life and used these possibilities to portray and criticise the society he knew well. He made his characters speak as they might have spoken in real life. This met with the opposition of some who considered the stage too sacred for domestic themes and colloquial speech, but soon the audience realised that Kailasam had come to stay for their own benefit and delight, and

1. 'ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯ ಕಸವನ್ನೂ ಧೂಳನ್ನೂ ಝಾಡಿಸಿ, ಬಣ್ಣ ಬಣ್ಣದ ಪರದೆಗಳನ್ನು ಕಿತ್ತೂ ಗೆದ್ದು, ಕೆಟೋಸೀನುಗಳನ್ನು ಕಟಾಯಿಸಿ, ಹಾಡುಗಳಿಗೆ ತುಂಡು ಹಾಕಿ ಹೊಸನಾಟಕದ ಪ್ರತಿಷ್ಠಾಪನೆ ಮಾಡಿದರು.'

ಎಂ. ವಿ. ಸೀತಾರಾಮಯ್ಯ. ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕ : ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯಸಮೀಕ್ಷೆ : ೧೯೫೪. ಪುಟ ೫೬.

that no opposition to him was possible.<sup>1</sup>

With perhaps the exceptions of *Sattavana Santāpa*, *Bahiskāra* and *Soole*, all the other plays of Kailasam (more than about twenty of them) have been repeatedly staged by amateur troupes all over the Kannada land. Among these troupes, the A. D. A., the Chāya Artists of Bangalore and the Old Boys' Association of the Maharaja's College, Mysore, deserve special mention. His plays came to be widely read for the humour if not for the significance of their social criticism. More than in the construction of plot, the genius of Kailasam is seen in the brilliant wit and humour that shine through his dialogues; but there is an over-flowing under-current of serious thought that adds to the significance of the play. These characteristics, typical of Kailasam, could be seen in plays like *Ammāvra Ganda*, that provided parallel pictures of two house-holds, *Tālikattokkūline*, that provided parallel pictures again, of the ways of a god-fearing traditionalist family with the ways of a dishonest sophisticated family; *Bandvālvillada Badāyi* and *Home Rule*, scathingly parodying artificial town-life: *Nam Clubbu*, poking fun at high-brow fashions: *Nam Brāhmanike*, exposing the hollowness of the claims of our priesthood and *Huttadalli Hutta*, picturing the urban phenomenon of the exploitation of the dull by the clever. All the plays of Kailasam exhibit his remarkable ability in portraying the secret twists and turns of the social mechanism and in magnifying them from the

1. “ಕೈಲಾಸಂ ಅವರು ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕಕ್ಕೆ ಕೊಟ್ಟ ಅಮೂಲ್ಯ ಕಾಡಿಕೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮರೆಯಲಾಗದು. ಮೊದಲನೆಯದಾಗಿ ಕನ್ನಡ ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯನ್ನು ಅವರು ಜೀತರಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವಂತೆ ಮಾಡಿದರು. ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕ ಅವರ ಕೈಯಲ್ಲಿ ಒಮ್ಮೆಲೆ ಮೈಕೊಡವಿ ಎದ್ದವರಂತೆ, ಅದ್ಭುತ ಜಟಿಲವಟಿಕೆಯನ್ನು ಪ್ರದರ್ಶಿಸಿತು. ಮಲಗಿದ್ದ ಸಮಾಜವನ್ನು ತಡವಿ, ಎಬ್ಬಿಸಿ, ಜೀರ್ಣಮಾಡಿ ಅವರು ರಂಗದ ಮೇಲೆ ತಂದರು. ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾಲಯದ ಪದವಿಯನ್ನು ಪಡೆದೂ ಪೂಳ್ಳಾದ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳು, ಬಂಧ್ಯಾಳಿಲ್ಲದ ಬಡಾಯಿಯನ್ನು ಕೊಚ್ಚುವ ವಕೀಲರು, ಅರಿವಿಲ್ಲದೆಯೇ ಉದಾತ್ತತೆಯನ್ನು ತೋರುವ ಬಾಯ್-ಸ್ಕಾಟುಗಳು, ಗೋಳಿನ ಕಹಿಯನ್ನೂ ವಿಧವೆಯೂ, ಹೆಂಡಂದಿರ ಹಿಡಿತದಲ್ಲಿ ಮೆತ್ತಗಾದ ಗಂಡಂದಿರು ಇವರೆಲ್ಲ ಮೊಟ್ಟ ಮೊದಲಿಗೆ ರಂಗದ ಬೆಳಕನ್ನು ಕಂಡರು. ಅದಲ್ಲದೆ ಈ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಳೆಲ್ಲ ಶ್ರೇಷ್ಠ ಮಾತುಗಾರರು. ಅವರು ಉಪಯೋಗಿಸುವ ಕೈಲಾಸಂ ಭಾಷಿನ ಭಾಷೆ, ಆ ನಾಟಕಗಳ ಮಟ್ಟಗಂತೂ ಅಪೂರ್ವವಾದ ಮಾಧ್ಯಮವಾಗಿದೆ. ಇದೇ ಸ್ವತಂತ್ರ ಮನೋವೃತ್ತಿ ಉಳಿದ ನಾಟಕಕಾರರಿಗೂ ಅದರ್ಶವಾಗಬೇಕು. ಈ ಭಾಷೆ ಇನ್ನು ಕೆಲ ವರ್ಷಗಳಾದ ನಂತರ ತಿಳಿಯಲಿಕ್ಕಿಲ್ಲವೆಂದು ಆಕ್ಷೇಪ ಬಂದಿದೆ. ಆದರೆ ಕೈಲಾಸಂ, ತಮ್ಮ ವಸ್ತುವಿಗೆ ತಕ್ಕಂತೆ ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಹದಗೊಳಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಆ ಭಾಷೆ, ಒಂದು ದೃಷ್ಟಿಯಿಂದ ಪಾತ್ರಗಳ ಸಹಜ ಮಾಧ್ಯಮವಾಗಿ ಬಂದರೆ, ಇನ್ನೊಂದು ದೃಷ್ಟಿಯಿಂದ ವಿನೋದಕಾರನ ಶಕ್ತಿಯುತವಾದ ಅಸ್ತವಾಗಿ ಬರುತ್ತದೆ, ಇದು ಕೈಲಾಸಂರ ವಿಡಂಬನದ ಅಪೂರ್ವ ರೀತಿ.”

ಕೀರ್ತನಾಥ ಕುರ್ತಕೋಟಿ: ‘ನಾಟಕ’: ‘ನಡೆದು ಬಂದ ದಾರಿ’ ೧೯೫೯

ಮನೋಹರ ಗ್ರಂಥಮಾಲಾ ಪ್ರಕಾಶನ ಪುಟ ೨೨೧.

angle of humour. As has been said, Kailasam pictured and solved the riddles of life with his inimitable humour. The sailing boat of his humour got better of the rough waves of grief and misery and moved steadily across life's long ocean of tears.<sup>1</sup>

The didactic steals the limelight from Kailasam's humour in plays like *Poli Kitti*, which says that appearances are deceptive and a man is to be judged by his deeds; *Tollu Gatti*, which portrays the triumph of good breeding over "educated" hypocritical sophistication; *Soole*, an intense tragedy that presents womanhood in three generations dogged by the hideous stigma of prostitution; *Vaidyana Vyādhi*, which provides a penetrating picture of the major disease of the doctor who pretends to cure the minor ailments of his neighbours and *Gandaskatri*, a compact one-act that revealed the amazing crookedness in a woman's nature. Kailasam proved that he could draw not only smiles but tears as well, with a play like *Bahiskāra*, which, like *Nageya Hoge* of Bendre, is one of the most powerful tragedies in modern Kannada dramatic literature. Though topical in its theme, the play stands on the merit of its dramatic qualities, with the self-sacrificing Narasu attaining truly classical stature. Kailasam turned his hand to mythological themes also, but treated these themes in English. *Karna* recreated the greatest of the tragic heroes of the Mahabhārata, while the *Purpose* retold the story of Ékalavya who was 'a victim of the brahmin's curse', and the *Burden* dealt with the theme of the tragic impact suffered by Bharata on his return from Nandigrāma to the ruined Ayōdhya. Kailasam's *Keechaka*, rebuilt by G. P. Rajarathnam on the basis of the memory of B. S. Ramarao presents a great portrait indeed, but inevitably, the

1. "ಕೈಲಾಸಂ ಶುದ್ಧ ಹಾಸ್ಯದ ವಿವಿಧ ಪದರುಗಳನ್ನು ನಾಟಕದ ಮುಖಾಂತರ ಬಿಡಿಸಿ ತೋರಿದರು. ಸರಸ ವಿನೋದ (humour) ದಿಂದ ಹಿಡಿದು ವಿದಗ್ಧತೆ (wit) ಯ ವರೆಗೆ ಅವರ ಹಾಸ್ಯ ಮೈಚಾಚಿಕೊಂಡಿದೆ. ಮುದ್ದಣಿಯ ತೊದಲುವಾತು, ಅಹೋಬ್ಬುವಿನ ಕಲ್ಪನಾ ವಿಲಾಸ, ನಾಗತ್ತೆಯ ಅಲಾಕಿಕ ತಿರಸ್ಕಾರ, ನರಸಿಂಹಯ್ಯನ ಕ್ರೂರ ವ್ಯಂಗ್ಯ, ಸುಬ್ಬಣ್ಣನ ನರ್ಮವಿನೋದ ಇವೆಲ್ಲ ಅಚ್ಚರಿಗೊಳಿಸುವಷ್ಟು ವೈವಿಧ್ಯಪೂರ್ಣವಾಗಿವೆ. ಸ್ವಭಾವ, ಸಂಭಾಷಣೆ, ಸನ್ನಿವೇಶ, ವಾತಾವರಣ ಎಲ್ಲ ಕಡೆಗೂ ಹಾಸ್ಯ ತುಂಬಿತುಳುಕುವಂತೆ ಕೈಲಾಸಂ ಮಾಡಿದರು. ನಾಯಕ ಪಾತ್ರದಲ್ಲಿಯೂ ವಿದೂಷಕತ್ವದ ಅಂಶವನ್ನು ಅವರು ಗುರುತಿಸಿದರು. ಕೈಲಾಸಂರ ನಾಟಕದೃಷ್ಟಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಅದು ಮಹತ್ವದ ಅಂಶವಾಗಿದೆ. 'ಮೊಲಿಯರ್' ಜಾತಿಯ ಅವರ ಪಾತ್ರವರ್ಗ ತನ್ನ ಅನನ್ಯತೆ (uniqueness)ಯಿಂದ ಇಂದಿಗೂ ಅಶ್ಚರ್ಯಕರವಾಗಿದೆ. ರಾಮಣ್ಣ, ಸುಬ್ಬಣ್ಣ, ನರಸಿಂಹಯ್ಯ, ಅಹೋಬ್ಬ, ನಾಗತ್ತೆ, ಮುದ್ದಣಿ, ಮಿಸ್ ಪ್ರಭಾಮಣಿ ಇವೆಲ್ಲ ಅನಾಸ್ತವಜೀವನವನ್ನು ನಡೆಸುವ ವಾಸ್ತವ ಪಾತ್ರಗಳು. ಈ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಳು ವಾಸ್ತವವಾಗಿರುವುದೇ ಕೈಲಾಸಂರ ದೃಷ್ಟಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಒಂದು ದೊಡ್ಡ ಜೋಕು. ಅಂತೇ ಅವರ ನಾಟಕಗಳ ಮೂಲಕೈರುವ ಈ ವಿನೋದಪ್ರಜ್ಞೆ ಜಾಗೃತವಾದಾಗಲೆಲ್ಲ ಕೈಲಾಸಂ ಅದ್ವಿತೀಯರಾಗುತ್ತಾರೆ." —ಕೀರ್ತಿನಾಥ ಕುರ್ತಕೋಟಿ. ಅದೇ—

dialogues are certainly poorer by Kailasam's own inimitable standards.

If Kailasam is sentimental in *Bahiškāra*, he is didactic in *Soole*, is mercilessly exposing in *Nam Brahmanike* and *Pātu Tavarmāne*, is moralising in *Poli Kitti* and *Tollu-Gatti* and is scathingly sarcastic in *Sattavana Santāpa* and *Vaidyana Vyādhī*. Whatever be the dominating sentiment of a play, his portraits of families and individuals are sharp and striking; his purpose is always clear and the final impression left by the play, always powerful. It will take a long time indeed before the Kannada land begins to forget his heroes and cowards, his goodmen and his scoundrels. Kailasam was a moralist, but he had the subtlety needed to carry off his moralising. His appreciation of what was really noble in traditional ways of living, added a grace to his plays. He gave the spoken language the status of literature. He created the new vogue for the satirical social play which proved that powerful prose with penetrating humour could do away with tinsel attractions of music, setting and costume. What is more, he improved popular taste with his plays and revolutionised popular ideas regarding the stage.

Even the great Kailasam was not free from faults. Sometimes, as in his later plays like *Vaidyana Vyādhī* and *Soole*, his dialogue deteriorated into declamation or oration. The colloquial he employed for his characters — a horrific jumble of *spoken* Kannada and English, described as 'Anglo-Kannada' by Kailasam himself — naturally gave room for strong criticism, and people wondered if this jumble would remain attractive or even comprehensible when Kannada grew out of its servitude to English.<sup>1</sup> Kailasam's fondness for alliteration often made his lines sound artificial.<sup>2</sup> A powerful play like *Bahiškāra* was considered too topical in its theme to cross the boundaries of a specific period. However this be, Kailasam's plays, judged as a whole, have merits of such a high order that they are likely to survive in spite of their drawbacks, and Kailasam will always be remembered as the architect of modern Kannada drama and first great builder of the Amateur theatre of Mysore.

But out of all this good came one inevitable but undesirable result.

1. 'ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕಗಳ ಭಾಷೆ'. ಎಸ್. ನಾರಾಯಣರಾವ್ : ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ VI. 1. ಪುಟ ೨೨-೨೩.
2. 'ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿ ಜನಾಯಸಿದೆ ಚಾಕರಿಗೆ ಚತುಷ್ಟದಾಸ'  
'ಬೀದೀಲೇನಾದ್ರೂ ಬಿಡಿಗಾಸು ಬಿದ್ದಿದೆಯೇಂತ ಬಗ್ಗಿ ನೋಡ್ತಾ ಬರೀದೀಯೇನೋ ಬಕ್ತೆ' — ಬಂಡ್ವಾಳಲ್ಲದ ಬಡಾಯಿ.

Kailasam's influence became a dead weight on creative talent of his successors. The Amateur stage became addicted almost exclusively to humorous plays, and these plays soon declined in quality. Other kinds of plays—historical plays, serious social plays, fantasies or pure romances—were attempted only extremely infrequently. So great was the vogue for the humorous social play created by Kailasam that the Kannada stage was forced to be content with a development which was one-sided. All the same, Kailasam remained the great pioneer, 'the Father of modern Kannada drama',<sup>1</sup> and 'the inimitable Kailasam'.<sup>2</sup> The sobriquets justify themselves when it is seen that Kailasam, like Bernard Shaw, diverted the attention of the audience from the actor to the playwright. From his times, the playwright and not the actor began to rule.

#### SRIRANGA :

While Kailasam pictured the life of the middle class of old Mysore, Sriranga portrayed the middle class of North Karnatak with a keen dramatic insight. Like Kailasam, he had been deeply impressed by the western thought on the handling of dramatic themes and technique of production. Several factors like the choice of a situation drawn from the life of the people around, a free and forceful usage of the spoken language, a mastery over subtle wit and scathing satire and an inimitable technique of dramatising new ideas earned an enviable reputation for his early plays. His triumph lies in the brilliance and power of his dialogue with which he turned any idea or situation into drama. Even though his plays are criticised as lacking in their emotional content, their intellectual vigour more than makes up for this lack. Like Kailasam, Sriranga is a stage-actor and as such, his plays have always been stage-worthy. Like Kailasam again, he wrought a revolution in the Kannada theatre and made the Amateur stage a force to reckon with. He had to face the bitter opposition of orthodoxy, for his plays launched an open attack on blind beliefs, unreasonable traditions and time honoured social stupidities. Kailasam looked on the foolishness of men with pity: but Sriranga believed in drawing the sword against all fools. Sriranga remained ruthless because he saw relief in mutilation. A keen intellectual he is with a highly logical thought process but he was so startlingly frank and cuttingly critical that the

1. 'ಅಧುನಿಕ ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕ ಪಿತಾಮಹ'

2. 'ಕನ್ನಡಕ್ಕೆ ಬನ್ನೆ ಕೈಲಾಸಂ'

contemporary society got deeply offended. His outbursts on temple, religion and God were considered too open and attacking.<sup>1</sup> But Sriranga went on heedlessly, harnessing all his wit, humour and inventiveness to a single purpose of exposing “cowardice and hypocrisy that masquerade under the name of virtue and religious tradition.”

Sriranga's contribution, beginning with his play *Udara Vairāgya* ( 1929 ) is bountiful both in volume and variety, with about twenty full length plays and sixty one-acts, mostly on social themes. He wrote an occasional historical play like *Paramēśwara Pulakēśi* and touched on our mythologies also only for writing out a satire like *Sampadharma. Harijanwār* which lashes out against the ‘ self-regarding professional reformer ’ is perhaps the most widely known of his plays. It brought him both high praise and better criticism. *Prapancha pānīpat* ( a jeer at the antiquated myth of the sanctity of the joint family system ) *Narakadalli Narasimha* ( an attack on the intellectual and moral poverty of the youth of the country ) *Mukkanna Virātapuruṣa* ( a new vision of woman as a potent power ) and his later plays—*Kapata Nataka* and *Śōka-Chakra* ( frontal attacks on hypocrisy and self-deception in political leadership ) are representative of his thought provoking work. A play like *Ahalyōddhāra* which considers it a noble act of liberation when a youth elopes with the young wife of an aged man, or another like *Aśwamēdha*, which provides a striking portrait of the sufferings of a helpless father who cannot find a husband for his daughter, though based on topical themes, are not likely to lose their attractiveness to future generations for they are eminently stageworthy and provide scintillating entertainment. His later plays like *Sandhyākāla*, *Jarūsandhi* and *Jeevana Jokāli* have not been considered as catching up with the earlier ones in regard to the intensity of purpose and dramatic power;<sup>1</sup> but the Amateur stage could always be optimistic of the creative ability of Sriranga.

- I. . . . . “ ಇಷ್ಟಕ್ಕೂ ಹೊಲಸನಾರುವುದು ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಭಾವಾರಾಧನೆಯೇ ಅಂತ ಕೇಳಿದೆ:—  
‘ ವಿಶ್ವೇಶ್ವರನ ಗುಡಿ ಸಮೀಪದಲ್ಲಿದೆ ಅದಕ್ಕೆ ’ . . . . . ಎಂದರು . . . . . ”  
“ . . . . . ಹೆಣ್ಣು ಹುಡುಗರ ತಂದೆ ಅಂದ್ರ ದೇವರ ಗುಡಿ ಅಂತ ತಿಳಿದಾನೇನೋ —  
ಮನಸ್ಸಿಗೆ ಬಂದದ್ದಾಗ ಮಂಗಳನ ಮಾಡ್ಲಿಕ್ಕೆ . . . . . ” — ಅಶ್ವಮೇಧ.
1. “ . . . ಮೊದಲಿನ ನಾಟಕಗಳನ್ನು ಬರೆಯುವಾಗ ಪ್ರೀತಿಯಿಂದ ತಮ್ಮ ಉತ್ಕಟವಾದ  
ಮನೋಗತವನ್ನು ನಾಟಕಗಳ ಮೂಲಕ ಹೇಳಬೇಕಾದ ಅವಶ್ಯಕತೆಯಿತ್ತು. ಅದರಿಂದ  
ಎಷ್ಟೋ ದೋಷಗಳಿದ್ದರೂ ಆ ನಾಟಕಗಳ ಉತ್ಕಟತೆಗೆ ಕುಂದು ಬಂದಿಲ್ಲ. ಬರಬರುತ್ತ  
ಉದ್ದೇಶ ಬದಲಾದರೂ ಇತಿ ಮೊದಲಿನದೇ ಉಳಿದು ಬಿಟ್ಟಿತು. ಮೊದಲು ಕಣ್ಣಿಗೆ

[ Contd. ]→

Himself a gifted artist, Sriranga collected some of the young enthusiasts of Dharwar and trained them in the art of acting and play-production. The *Kannada Vilāsigaḷa Saṅgha* had the privilege of staging almost every play he wrote. It also toured extensively from time to time in the representative cities of North Karnatak. Its performances are simple but effective without pompous setting and scenery; a new stage device like the shadow effect in *Śokachakra*, now and then adding memorably to the play. Like Kailasm again, he gave a new turn to the drama ( in North Karnatak ) by banishing from his plays, “ music ( except in *Udar Vairāgya* ) sugary sentiments, hackneyed themes and unrealistic character types from the theatre—boards and by galvanising drama into a dynamic art-form.” It was natural that his plays toned up the Amateur stage of North Karnatak and gave it a new power and brilliance.

#### KARANTH:

What Kailasam gave as a pioneer to the Mysore amateur stage and Sriranga to that of North Karnatak, Shivarama Karanth gave to South Canara. He created for South Canara an amateur stage and enriched it with his own undaunted experiments in themes and forms of drama. Drawing his themes from the mythologies, history, contemporary society and folk-lore, Karanth presented them in several different forms as full-length plays, One-acts, Operas, Shadow-plays, Mimes and Dance-plays. Like Kailasam and Sriranga, Karanth was a social revolutionary who wielded the sword of satire and the scalpel of irony. Himself an actor and director of immense capacity, Karanth influenced the Amateur stage of Karnatak and helped to make it a

ಕಾಣದಿದ್ದ ದೋಷಗಳು ಈಗ ಸ್ಪಷ್ಟವಾಗಿ ಗೋಚರಿಸತೊಡಗಿದವು. . . . . ಪಾತ್ರಗಳು ಸಜೀವವಾಗಿ ಜೀವನದಲ್ಲಿಯಷ್ಟೇ ಸಜವಾಗಿದ್ದರೆ ಸಾಲದು. ಅವು ತಮ್ಮ ನಾಟ್ಯೋದ್ದೇಶವನ್ನು ಪೂರೈಸುತ್ತಲೇ ನಾಟಕದ ವಸ್ತುವನ್ನೂ ಸೃಷ್ಟಿಸುತ್ತಿರಬೇಕು. ಶ್ರೀರಂಗರ ಅನೇಕನ ನಾಟಕಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಈ ಕೊರತೆಯನ್ನು ನಾವು ಕಾಣುತ್ತೇವೆ— ಸಂವಿಧಾನದ ನೇಯ್ಗೆ ಉದ್ದೇಶಕ್ಕಿಂತ ಕಡಿಮೆಯಾಗಿ ಬಿಡುವದರಿಂದ, ಪಾತ್ರಗಳು ಅಡ್ಡಮಾತಿಗೆ ಪ್ರಾರಂಭಿಸುತ್ತವೆ ‘ ಸಂಧ್ಯಾಕಾಲ ’ ದಲ್ಲಿಯೆ ವೆಂಕಣ್ಣನ ಪ್ರವೇಶ ನಾಟಕವನ್ನು ಬೇರೆ ದಿಕ್ಕಿಗೆ ಒಯ್ದು ಬಿಡುತ್ತದೆ. ಪುಟ್ಟವಿನ ಹೊರಗಿನ ವ್ಯವಹಾರದ ಗತಿ ಏನಾಯಿತೋ ತಿಳಿದುಬರುವುದಿಲ್ಲ. ‘ ಜರಾಸಂಧಿ ’ ಯಲ್ಲಿಯ ಜನ್ಮ ಹಾಗೂ ಅನಂತ, ‘ ಜೀವನ ಜೋಕಾಲಿ ’ ಯ ಎಂ. ಬಿ. ಈ ಪಾತ್ರಗಳು ಕೇವಲ ಮಾತಾಡಲಿಕ್ಕೆಂದೇ ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯ ಮೇಲೆ ಬರುತ್ತವೆ. ನಾಟಕದ ರೂಪ ತನ್ನ ಅರ್ಥವನ್ನು ಇಂಥ ಹೊತ್ತಿಗೆ ಕಳೆದುಕೊಂಡು ಬಿಡುತ್ತದೆ. ಮುಖ್ಯವಾಗಿ ಶ್ರೀರಂಗರ ನಾಟಕ ತಂತ್ರ ತನ್ನ ಉದ್ದೇಶ ಮುಗಿದ ಮೇಲೆ ಮುಂದಿನ ಬೆಳವಣಿಗೆಯನ್ನು ಕಾಣಲಿಲ್ಲ.”

—ಶೀರ್ಷಿಕಾ ಕುರ್ತಕೋಟಿ, ‘ ನಡೆದುಬಂದ ದಾರಿ ’ ಪುಟ ೨೨೮.

potent medium of rich entertainment and social reform.

Two of his prominent full-length plays expose the hypocrisy, stupidity and cruel selfishness of those who occupy important positions in society and religion. *Bittida Bele*, a play in five acts is a telling satire on the social tendency of treating the poor as subservient hangers on the economically well-placed section. Though its dialogue degenerates into long speeches here and there and the tragic end is not quite convincing, the play is unequivocal in its purpose and rises to impressive heights of emotion. *Garbhagudi* is more realistic in its theme, artistic in its development and powerful in its impact. It is a sweeping attack on those who exploit religious institutions for personal ends. *Nātakavemba Nātaka* is a powerful satire, typical of Karanth, sledge hammering the excesses and affectations of the professional stage. *Hiriyakkana Cāḷi Dristi Sangama*, *Kaṭṭe Purāṇa* and other social plays of his are again, purposeful, ironic and human.

Karanth brought about a new consciousness in South Canara about drama and the stage. Almost all his plays including the operas and mimes have been staged by student-groups in Mangalore and he did undoubted pioneer work in conducting successful experiments in different dramatic forms. Thus it is interesting to note that Kailasam, Sriranga and Karanth combined in them unique qualities of the playwright and the performer. They employed the same weapons of humour and satire and championed the cause of the amateur stage in the three main regions of Karnatak. Together with D. R. Bendre and A. N. Krishnarao, they achieved the Amateur Theatre for Karnatak.

D. R. BENDRE:

A name to conjure with among the poets of Karnatak, D. R. Bendre is also a noted playwright of immense suggestiveness, wit and power. Witty, humourous and devastatingly satirical by turns, he can bring subtlety and significance to any dramatic theme. Plays like *Tirukara Pidugu*, *Sayo Āta* and *Devvada Mane* exhibit all the shades of his humour and his brilliant bubbling wit. Plays like *Uddhāra*, *Nageya Hoge* and the recent *Hosa Samsāra* reveal his insight into serious social and domestic problems. An undercurrent of thought and meaning is invariably found below the surface of the scintillating fun he creates, and his triumph is supreme while dealing with a thoughtful theme. Amateur troupes like the Kalopāsaka Mandala of Dharwar and the Karnatak College Amateurs have staged his plays in different parts of North Karnatak with credit, but his one-acts have crossed the borders of North Karnatak.

In fact, it was Bendre who inaugurated the tradition of the one-act play in North Karnatak, with his *goal*.<sup>1</sup> He also began a new type of Kannada play – his *Tirukara Pidugu*. It is a hilarious picture, but has a more significant purpose than even its first rate humour—it reveals the thousand faces worn by the hunger and poverty of our country. It also caricatures the superficial air of the well-to-do. The Play has only one role to be played on the stage; an endless procession of beggars pass before him (unseen by the audience), and he ironically comments on each one of them. *Tirukara Pidugu* is a unique contribution to the amateur stage as a *mono-acting* play.

Bendre also brought to the Amateur stage a new way of looking at themes. A play in this direction is his *Hosa Samsāra* which provides a peep into the human mind, especially to the subtle and flashing mind of the woman. The play, replete with humour, reveals a story of little suspicious nursed by little minds poisoning the whole atmosphere of a house.

Bendre's contribution to the dramatic literature is comparatively small in volume, but is considerable in the variety of themes. Tempered with a rare wit and humour and reflecting a true understanding of the ways of men and women, his plays have added colour and meaning to the Amateur stage of North Karnatak.

A. N. Krishnarao, V. K. Gokak and R. S. Mugali, all the three well known for their distinguished work in other fields of Kannada literature, have also written plays of considerable merit. Krishnarao's early plays like *Maduveyō Manehālō* a bitter portrait of a rich old man's lust for marriage, *Aahuti* a romantic tragedy, *Gomukha Vyāghra* a powerful play that dealt with the problem of unequal marriage, and also his brilliant one-acts including *Pālu* assured him a place in the field of Kannada drama. The A. D. A. of Bangalore tirelessly staged his plays. The amateur stage surely suffered a loss when Krishnarao settled down to writing novels. V. K. Gokak, one of the most imaginative and purposeful of Kannada writers distinguished himself as a dramatist by his scathing satire *Vimarsaka Vaidya* and the other revealing social plays like *Yugāntara* and *Jananāyaka*. R. S. Mugali tried more experiments in dramatic forms and themes. His *Pāvana Pāvaka* could be a visual picture of sheer poetic grandeur. *Akkamahā-devi* and his ten one-acts collected in *Ettida Kai*, and his social satire

1. ಅರ್. ವಿ. ಜಾಗಿರದಾರ : ಇಂದಿನ ಕನ್ನಡದಲ್ಲಿ ಏಕಾಂಕಗಳು.

—ಪ್ರಬುದ್ಧ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ : ಬೆಳ್ಳಿಯ ಸಂಚಿಕೆ, ೧೯೪೫, ಪುಟ-೫.

*Nāmadhāri* gave hopes for the Amateur stage; but though the one-acts of Muguli have been staged, his other plays have only been more widely read.

Of the junior playwrights who invariably came to be influenced by one or the other of the pioneers like Kailasam, Sriranga, Bendre or Karanth and who wrote full-length plays, mention may be made of L. J. Bendre of Dharwar. He is the author of impressive social plays like *Bhāgyashree*, *Parivartana*, *Hālu Tota* and *Madivi Paṭṭala*, plays which exhibited a rare grasp of the elements of stage-craft. A mention may also be made of Parvatavāni of Bangalore who is hailed as a true successor of Kailasam<sup>1</sup>. Apart from successfully adapting into Kannada western plays like *The Taming of the Shrew* (*Bahādur Ganda*), *She Stoops to Conquer* (*Undādi Gunda*), *The Comedy of Errors* (*Viparyāsa*) and *School for Scandal* (*Bannadu Bombe*), he also wrote original plays like *Meena Maduve*, *Vārshikōtsava* and *Padmāvati Parinaya*. These plays, replete with humour and infused with a purpose, have brought him recognition as a dramatist of real ability. L. J. Bendre and Parvatavani are intimately connected with leading amateur troupes of Karnatak and their plays are being staged. Recently, V. M. Inamdar, Keertinath Kurtakoti and Jadabharata have written significant plays for the Amateur stage. Inamdar's *Bidugade* is the dream of any amateur troupe. *Aamani* of Kurtakoti and *Mookabali* of Jadabharata are considered beyond the possibility of the present stage, but they too richly deserve the attention of our leading troupes.

#### THE ONE-ACT PLAY:

The Amateur stage of the last two decades seems to have thrived on one-act plays, and almost every playwright of Karnatak wrote some one-acts in addition to his full-length plays. The one-act is a direct and fast-running short play with a few special characteristics like speedy action, economy in expression and a final impressive climax. A particular act detached from a full length play can not be a one-act, for, the one-act is like a golden ring rather than a detached link of a gold chain. It should have a dramatic theme as its first requisite and

1. Kailasam is reported to have seen his successor in Parvatavani. He is reported to have said :

“ ನನ್ನ ಇಪ್ಪತ್ತೇಳು ವರ್ಷಗಳ ಕನಸು ಇಂದು ನನಸಾಯಿತು. ನಮ್ಮ ಜನ-ಜೀವನವನ್ನು ಕನ್ನಡಿಸುವಂತಹ ನಾಟಕಗಳನ್ನು ಇನ್ನು ಮುಂದಾದರೂ ಬರೆದು ಅಡಿತೋರಿಸುವಂತಹವರೊಬ್ಬರು ಇರುವರೆಂಬುದನ್ನು ನಾನಿಂದು ಕಣ್ಣಿಂದ ನೋಡಿ ಅಮಿತಾನಂದಪೂರಿತನಾಗಿದ್ದೇನೆ. ”

‘ ಮೀನಾಮದುನೆ ’ ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಕಾಶಕರ ಮುನ್ನುಡಿ.

be bound by the three Unities of Time, Place and Action. It may be in one scene as *Yamana Solu* of Sriranga, in more scenes as in *Uddhāra* of Bendre, but its purpose remains the same: directness in dealing with a theme and full entertainment in a short span of time.

Inaugurated by *Tollu-Gatti* of Kailasham in Mysore and by *Goal* of D. R. Bendre in North Karnatak, the one-act has remained the most popular of dramatic forms on the Amateur stage. It comes in handy for an anniversary or a College Day, when the number of players available is small and the time allotted for entertainment short. More than all, no great problems arise in its production. It has been essentially social in theme, humorous in nature and often intellectual in import. Kailasam, Sriranga, Kuvempu, Karanth, Bendre, Krishnarao, M. N. Kamat, Krishnakumar Kallur, Mugali, Chi. Sadasiviah and other senior and leading playwrights wrote a good number of one-acts. Prominent among more recent but established playwrights of one-acts is Ksheera Sāgara, who, with his fine sense of humour and expert knowledge of stage-craft, soon made himself very popular with plays like *Shāmannana Sāhasa*, *Deepavali*, *Nischitārtha* and *Kashiyātre*. Kaiwar Rajarao who excels in homely dialogues wrote entertaining plays like *Gandana Julmāne*, *Patra Pramāda*, *Hengasara Bandāya* and *Prema Pareekshe*. N.K. Kulkarni a popular playwright of North Karnatak, well-known as a humourist, poked gentle fun at human foibles with his one-acts like *B. T. Buddhivanta*, *U. T. C. Parishat*, *Bar Room* and *Vidyā*. M. N. Babu, author of a few penetrating plays like *Rāghannana Ratha* drew both a smile and a tear at the same time. His *Bādige Meese*, *Guru Bhayankara* and *Cinema Aliya* are truly hilarious. N. Kasturi gave a few brilliant pieces like *Gaggayyana Gadibidi*, *Vaikunta* and *Kadāne*. M. V. Sitaramiah, Tengse Govindarao, N. M. Kulkarni and other playwrights enriched Kannada dramatic literature with their one-acts.

The one-act proved to be the ideal form for modern times and it had no difficulty in thriving along with the Cinema. It has been most popular with the student amateurs. It has grown both in volume and variety, touching almost every aspect of modern life, like meaning of education ( *Tollu Gatti*, *B. T. Buddhivanta*, *Adbhuta Shikshana* and other plays ) evils of ignorance ( *Katte Purāṇa*, *Aadaddenu*, *Pūrvaranga* and other plays ), the problem of unemployment of the educated ( *Sarkassina Sarasvati*, *Bar room*, *Triśūla*, *Nannadalla* and other plays ), the question of unequal marriage ( *Ammāvra gāṇḍa*, *Henṇina Toḍaku*, *Aśva-mēdha* and other plays ) and a variety of domestic and social problems ( *Home rule*, *Prapanca Pravāha*, *Bahiṣkāra*, *Nāḷkaneya Piṣāchi* and other

plays ). The total number of one-acts written during these three decades may have well exceeded three hundred.

The one-act play, all the same, has not been an unmixed blessing. Its dramatic requirements do not appear to have been properly appreciated by quite a number of its practitioners; secondly, the amateur stage seems to have become too much satisfied with the one-act. It has also given room to a feeling that the satisfaction it gives is a false satisfaction. This feeling is possibly due to the consideration that the one-act, and sometimes even the full-length social play, is incapable of building up a 'classical' atmosphere of dignity and power, availing itself of all the fine arts that go to make a true drama—the time honoured *nāṭyā*. It is not far from truth, that it looks as though the lofty institution of the theatre has been made to hang on to the thin purpose of light humour, when the one-act play becomes the chief vehicle for the stage. There are brilliant exceptions of course, like *Bahishkār*, *Kapatanataka Nāḍumaneyalli*, *Hosa Samsāra* or *Bidugade*, but, for such exceptions, one has to go back to the pioneers alone. Many an other social play is incapable of giving any satisfaction. As Prof. R. Anantha Krishna Sarma pointed out, great ideals or noble emotions have little scope for development in the modern social play, particularly in the one-act: the aesthetic experience they provide is consequently insignificant.<sup>1</sup>

#### PRESENTATION :

The role of production in the amateur play is so restricted, that if the play becomes impressive in showmanship it is only an exception than the rule. The new play hangs on the IDEA; its story illustrates or exemplifies the idea with humour. The stage is simple, unadorned, almost a passive setting for the play. In this regard, it looks that what the professionals over did, the amateurs seem to omit in its entirety.

The art of make-up 'a specialised technical science,' one of the glories of the folk-theatre even to-day, seems to be totally useless to the amateur stage. The artist, if he is quick, paints his face, sticks

1. ಇವುಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ರಸದ ಮಾತು ಹಾಗಿರಲಿ, ಭಾವ ತೀವ್ರತೆಗೆ ಕೂಡ ತಕ್ಕಷ್ಟು ಅವಕಾಶವಿಲ್ಲ. ಇವುಗಳನ್ನು ನೋಡಿದಾಗ, ಓದಿದಾಗ, ನಮಗೆ ಆಗುವ ಅನುಭವ, ಅಕ್ಕದ ಮನೆಗೋ ಪಕ್ಕದ ಮನೆಗೋ ಹೋಗಿ, ಘಂಟೆಹೊತ್ತು ಲೋಕಾಭಿರಾಮವಾಗಿ ಹರಟೆ ಹೊಡೆದು ಕಾಲ ಕ್ಷೇಪಮಾಡಿ ಬರುವಾಗಿನ ಅನುಭವಕ್ಕಿಂತ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಸ್ಥಿರವೂ ಅಲ್ಲ—ಹೆಚ್ಚು ವಿಶಾಲವೂ ಅಲ್ಲ. . . . ಯಾವ ಉದಾರಾದರ್ಶಕ್ಕಾಗಲೀ, ಉದಾತ್ತಭಾವಕ್ಕಾಗಲೀ ಪ್ರಾಮುಖ್ಯವಿಲ್ಲದುದರಿಂದ, ಇಲ್ಲಿನ ಯಾವ ಅನುಭವಕ್ಕೂ ಸತ್ವವಿಲ್ಲ.

—ರಾ. ಅನಂತಕೃಷ್ಣಶರ್ಮ: 'ನಾಟಕೋಪನ್ಯಾಸ'. ಪ್ರಬುದ್ಧ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ—ಸಂ. ೨೧: ಸಂ.೧.

a moustache to his upper lip, and is ready in five minutes. It is usually a thin water-paint that provides the foundation colour, and it was till recently used without discrimination, for, even the 'servant' and the 'old widow' painted themselves. Only the 'women' in the play used to be paid some attention, for the roles were played by male actors; but when girls themselves came forward to participate in these plays without fear of social disapproval, even the 'women' did not need much of a make-up. Thus a play here is very convenient for the producers: but the total absence of any scope for make-up and settings, has deprived the amateur stage of considerable visual appeal. The art of make-up and the art of arranging tasteful and suggestive settings are fine arts. They are desirable for the creation of that illusion of reality which is essential for the stage. It would not be in the interest of the theatre to allow these arts to decay. It is necessary again, that the Amateur stage should concentrate on an occasional mythological or historical play in one-act in order to relieve the monotony of social themes, and also to nourish and develop the fine arts connected with the stage. The Amateur theatre is now addressing itself to the educated, sophisticated and intellectual minority. It should not content itself catering to a particular section but should strive to appeal to the community as a whole, to its diverse tastes.

#### ARTISTS:

The amateur actor is no more persued by the stigma that dogged the professional actor for centuries as *Kusheelava*, the social immoral. The educated actor of the amateur stage is invariably a man of some social standing with an obligation to preserve the morality, good taste and honour of the stage. Even the professional actor is now looked upon with some consideration, though what T. Raghavachari said two decades ago about the dangers of taking to the stage as a profession, still remains true in some degree.<sup>1</sup> Educated women have come forward to make the amateur stage look natural. Girls belonging to respectable families have come to appear on the stage along with men: this happy practice seems to have been begun by the A. D. A. of Bangalore.

The amateur theatre has its great advantage in its playwright who is also a potential actor invariably. Luckily for our stage, its pioneer-

1. ಹೇಗೆ ಹೇಗೆ ವಿಚಾರ ಮಾಡಿದರೂ ಈಗಿನ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಪರಿಸ್ಥಿತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ರಂಗವನ್ನು ವೃತ್ತಿಯಾಗಿ ಆಲಂಕರಿಸಿದರೆ ಅದರಿಂದ ಆರ್ಥಿಕ ಲಾಭವೂ ಇಲ್ಲ—ಗೌರವವಾದ ಪದವಿಯೂ ಇಲ್ಲ.

— ಟಿ. ರಾಘವಾಚಾರಿ, ನಾಟಕೋತ್ಸವದ ಆದ್ಯಕ್ಷ ಭಾಷಣ, ೧೯೩೫, ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ

playwrights—including Kailasam, Sriranga and Karanth—being actors of consummate skill, were able to lay down a good tradition in play-acting and production. Leading amateur troupes enjoyed the services of artists who could compare favourably in talent with the leading professional artists of any region. T. Raghavachari was a flourishing lawyer, and Devadu Narasimha Shastri a noted writer, but both, with their bountiful talent gave a status and career to the Amateur Dramatic Association of Bangalore. D. Laxmanayya an advocate, and C. Anandrao a Palace official come to be known for their rich histrionic talent in the performances of the Literary Dramatic Association of Mysore. Dr. N. S. Narayana Shastri, Dr. A. M. Natesh, A. C. Narsimha Murthy, T. M. Ameer, V. K. Shrinivasan, G. B. Jayarao, B. Krishnamurthy, Sampath, Gururaja Rao and other senior members of the Old Boys Associations of the Maharaja's College of Mysore compared well with the best of the professional artists of their time. N. Kasturi, C. K. Nagaraja Rao, Chi Sadasiviah of Bangalore, N. S. Vaman, Vijaya Rajarao and Ranganath of Mysore, S. H. Parvati, Mangalvede and C. S. Bennur of Bagalkot, K. G. Halsigi, G. V. Hiremath and V. M. Inamdar of Dharwar, Joladarashi Doddan Gowda and Y. M. Chandrayya of Bellary are but a few names in a galaxy of brilliant artists who brought in considerable lustre to the Amateur stage of the Kannada country. It is true, the actor has forfeited his once lofty position in favour of the playwright in the Amateur theatre—reversing the position then prevailing in the professional theatre, but even so, he is to play a vital role for the success of the stage. It is after all the actor who ultimately brings home the full import of a play—be it the 'sentimental stuff' of the professional stage or the 'Intellectual play of Ideas' of the Amateur stage—and it may be said in this regard, that Karnatak seems to be fortunate in its artists.

#### NEW EXPERIMENTS:

Drawing its inspiration from the advanced West, and in tune with the development of various theatrical modes in other parts of India, Karnatak tried several experiments in recent years, with considerable success in building up different theatrical modes like the Opera, the Impromptu play, the Mono-play, the Shadow play, the Dance-play, the Mime and the Children's play. Most of the early experiments in these modes were made by K. Shivarama Karanth of South Canara. The experiments were continued by later writers and producers all over Karnatak.

## THE OPERA :

The Opera, a musical representation of drama, is a more advanced and refined medium than the Spoken-word play in the West. It is capable of portraying different emotions of different characters at the same time. The opera in the West is inevitably associated with the 'emotional dance,' though not to the same extent as the ballet. The contribution of the orchestra to Western opera is considerable. The atmosphere built up by the opera, in spite of the feeling that its intense romantic music is not invariably in 'good taste',<sup>1</sup> has earned for it an eminent position. The opera in our country is not so closely associated with the dance.<sup>2</sup> It is just 'a poetical tale or a fiction presented in music and acting, aided by a few musical instruments.'

Kannada Operas, though small in number, have exhibited a high musical quality and have proved to be quite dramatic. B. M. Srikantiah's *Aswathāman*, a play modelled on Greek Tragedy with a number of excellent choruses and songs, truly attained the status of an opera. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar's *Tirupāni*, with its rich treasure of songs and intense drama was another striking work. Neither of these, however, received from the Amateur stage the serious attention they deserved.

It was Shivarama Karanth who wrote operas, composed music for them, acted in them and established them as a dynamic art-form on the Amateur stage. His operas are based on apparently common place themes: but he endowed these themes with beauty and power, for he is a writer of remarkable skill and clarity of vision. Only some of them like *Ritu Yātre* (The Cycle of seasons) and *Buddhodaya* (Birth of the Buddha) include dances, but every one of them is an intense emotional experience for the spectator. *Lava-Kusha* and *Satyavān Sāvitrī* deal with well-known mythological themes while *Kisā Gotamī* and *Buddhodaya* are based on Buddhist legends. *Ritu Yatre* portrays rural life set against the background of Nature. *Muktadwāra* pictures the story of humanity and of the prophets who failed to uplift it. Both the operas can become magnificent in production, rich as they are in the opportunities they provide for dance and music. *Somiya Saubhagya* is again an opera in which the dance has a great role to play. It is a poignant tragedy set in rural atmosphere. *Yāro Andaru*, which deals with the

1. Edward J. Dent; *Opera*. Penguin Books p. 15.

2. Exceptions were found on the Sanskrit Stage of the 16th century—*Krishna Leela Tarangini*. P. Sambamurthy, *A History of Indian Operas*: S. Krishnaswami Iyengar's Commemoration Volume. p. 422.

strange manifestations of the village scandal is a triumph for Karanth, the satirist.

All the operas of Karanth including even the long *Badukabahudu* have been staged.<sup>1</sup> Some of them like *Kisā Gotami*, *Lava-Kuśa* and *Sāvitri Satyavāna* have remained highly popular. *Lava-Kuśa* has been staged with equal success as a Dumb-show and as a Shadow-play also. It was Karanth's operas which showed for the first time in Karnataka that music and gesture can create great drama. He has written music for them mostly in appropriate *rāgas* of Hindusthani Classical music. Many a folk musical pattern has given them great charm. Some of his operas, like *Somiya Saubhagya*, *Lava-Kuśa* and *Sāvitri Satyavān* have been aided by the chorus which, with its narrative music carries the story forward, reacts to the emotions of the characters and adds strength and beauty to the performance. It may look at first sight as though the properties at the disposal of the amateur stage are too limited for the grand imagery provided by *Ritu-Yātra*, where Nature, cruel, kindly and unpredictable, is made an important character. But even this work could be produced with effect provided Nature is represented symbolically. Whether Karanth's operas need fabulous settings or not, they do demand musical and histrionic talent and careful production. When Karanth himself produces his operas, they rarely fail to provide a new and unforgettable experience to the discerning.

P. T. Narsimhachar, a noted poet with a real sense of music and drama, recreated great stories from the epics in his full length operas like *Ahalya* and *Gokula Nirgamana*. His operas are charged with deep emotion and high sentiment and are essentially poetic in atmosphere.<sup>2</sup> But their production seems to be beyond the reach of the Amateur stage. If they could ever be done in full, they would provide a rare and elevating experience. Hitherto however, in spite of attempts to bring them on the stage in parts, the operas of 'P. T. N.' have yet remained *Shravya Kāvya*, in that they are widely read and frequently broadcast.

Kumar Venkanna wrote three operas dealing with national themes—*Bhārata Shakti*, *Bharata Geeta* and *Odeda Kanasu*. The first

1. ಈ ಎಲ್ಲ ನಾಟಕಗಳನ್ನು ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಗೆ ತಂದುದರಿಂದ ಇವು ಕೇವಲ ಆರಾಮಾಸನದ ಕನಸುಗಳೆಂದು ಯಾರೂ ಭಾವಿಸಬೇಕಾಗಿಲ್ಲ.

—ಶಿವರಾಮ ಕಾರಂತ : ನೀತಿನಾಟಕಗಳು. ಪ್ರಸ್ತಾವನೆ. ಪುಟ ೫-೬.

2. ಪು. ೩. ನ ಅವರ ಕಾವ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಕವಿತಾಶಕ್ತಿಯೊಡನೆ ದಿವ್ಯದರ್ಶನವೊಂದು ಸಂಗಮವಾಗಿ, ಬೆಳುದಿಂಗಳಿನಂತಹ ಭಾವ, ಹೂವಿನಂತಹ ಮಾತು, ತಂಗಾಳಿಯಂತಹ ಸನ್ನಿವೇಶಗಳು ಸೃಷ್ಟಿಯಾಗಿವೆ. ಕಾವ್ಯಧರ್ಮ ಹಾಗೂ ಧರ್ಮಗಳೆರಡೂ ಸಮರಸವಾಗಿ ಬೆರೆತಿವೆ.

—ತ. ಸು. ಶಾಮರಾಯ : ಕನ್ನಡ ನಾಟಕ : ಅಪ್ರಕಟಿತ ಮಹಾಪ್ರಬಂಧ.

deals with the significance of Indian Independence and the third is a satire on party politics. In their movement and structure, his operas seem to have been influenced by Yakshagāna. There is scope for music, dance and shadow-effects in them.

Keerthinath Kurtakoti, a young poet of Gadag composed attractive operas like *Swapnadarshi* and *Sabari*. Like *Pāvana Pāvaka* of Mugali, *Swapnadarshi* sketches on a vast canvas, the adventures of a sensitive youth in quest of the Light of Knowledge. The opera became a stirring experience to the listener when it was produced by Bhimsen Joshi on the air. Though simple in theme, Keerti's operas prove impressive owing to their emotional intensity and subtle poetry. If Karanth's operas are essentially dramatic and those of Narasimhachar are intrinsically poetical, Keerti's have a good measure of both the qualities. His operas have been staged by student-amateurs of Gadag. Of the recent contributors to Kannada opera, mention may be made of Ammembala Shankaranarayana and K. V. Subbanna.

#### THE DANCE DRAMA :

Close to the opera is the Dance drama and Theme dances, now popular on the amateur stage. Like the Western ballet, the Dance drama places emphasis on dance and gesture to interpret a theme; but the technique here may not be strictly classical as in Kathakkali though they bring home the full import of an emotion. In recent times, particularly during the last two decades more and more youngsters are being trained in dancing and these amateur dancers—boys and girls—are popularising the dance-drama which is virtually the time honoured theme dances of old times. This recent medium has brought a revival of some of the classical themes—mythological and historical—to the Amateur stage, *Vishwāmitra Mēnaka*, *Śiva Pārvati*, and *Kāmadahana* could be cited as a few typical examples. Social themes also have been taken up by progressive performers like Srinivasa Kulkarni, Krishna Kumar, Umesh Heranjal and others in North Karnataka, U. S. Krishnarao and Simha in Mysore and Karanth in South Canara. Successful dance-dramas have been composed on various themes like poverty, evils of drinking and the condition of Indian labourer. Short and entertaining theme-dances like *Snake Charmer*, the *Hasty lover* or the *Beggar and the child* flourish side by side with dance-dramas on serious themes of *Arunagiri* and *Chandra Kinnara*. A new trend is the attempt to interpret through dances the lyrics of our Saint composers and our modern Poets. These attempts have gained a steady popularity.

The Dance-drama of the amateur stage pays particular attention to the art of make-up and to costumes, though it is comparatively poor in settings and scenery. The performance of each theme usually covers a duration of about fifteen minutes and is supported by an orchestra which provides both musical effects to the performance and accompaniment to the 'play-back singer.' The dance-drama makes good use of stage devices—particularly light and shadow effects. It is performed mostly by boys and girls, teenagers who have received some training, and, but for its invariably amorous themes, the dance-drama could really help in building up a good childrens' theatre. It attracts the adult audiences as well, and is fast becoming more popular than the opera. It is a symbol of the revival of music, dance and gesture which originally formed the chief ingredients of Drama.

#### THE IMPROMPTU PLAY:

The impromptu play which is becoming popular, is hardly about two decades old. The 'staff plays' produced annually by the staff members of the Maharaja's College of Mysore to entertain the outgoing students, were perhaps the first impromptu plays in Karnatak. The busy professors who had neither the leisure nor the patience to rehearse a written play met on the day of the performance, thought of a theme, discussed details regarding its development and went on the stage in make-up. The details of the play and its duration depended entirely on the ingenuity of the actors who had to react intelligently to all the unexpected expressions, interrogations and twists and turns of speech provided by each other, at the same time ensuring that the play moved on to a successful climax. The aim of the play was to provide hilarity but its actual shape could never be determined before hand. In a way, the Impromptu play is a challenge to the intelligence, alertness and histrionic ability of its actors, and its success depends entirely on their genius.

It is true that the seeds of the Impromptu play are seen in the folk performances like *Prasanga* and *Yakṣagāna*, but even there, the orbit of the theme is defined by the *Bhāgavata* whose songs are interpreted in dialogues by the characters. The *Prasanga* too is more an intellectual exposition of a theme than a regular play. The Impromptu play, however, with its uncertainty even with regard to the theme, can not be compared with the above mentioned folk performances which seem to stand on a surer footing. The very quality of its charming uncertainty has made the Impromptu play very popular both with the artist and the audience.

Initiated by the staff of the Mysore College under the Guidance of the brilliant N. Kasturi and N. S. Narayana Sastri, the Impromptu play caught the attention of the Kannada land. Several amateur troupes tried it with success. Impromptu play competitions became an attractive feature of Kannada literary conferences. The Manohara Granthamāla of Dharwar arranged a competition of Impromptu plays on the occasion of its *Sāhityotsava*. Only the title of the play, and sometimes, a very brief synopsis of the theme was given on the day of the performance. It must be said that these competitions bore fruitful results, for, plays of true dramatic merit saw the light of the day because of such occasions. *Saubhāgya*, the prize winning play staged by Chi. Sadasiviah and his troupe on the occasion of the Sahityotsava of Manohar Granthamāla, *Chunāvaneya Chākachakya*, staged by N. Kasturi and friends on the occasion of the Kannada conference at Shimoga, *Dharmada Dolu*, staged by the United Artists of Bangalore on the occasion of the Literary Festival of the Sāhitya Parishat in 1946, deserve special mention in this regard. Many another impromptu performance shaped itself into a brilliant one-act play when it was later written down and published, like *Guggayyana Gadibidi*, *Vara Pareekshe* and *Kūdāne* of N. Kasturi and *Panchāṅga Sravana*, *Bhavishya* and *Swayamvara* of M. V. Sitaramiah.

With its unexpected pitfalls and ever present excitement, the Impromptu play always provided an excellent training ground for the artist: it taught him to be on the alert and gave him an understanding of the needs of the stage. It is an acid-test of his talent, a bountiful entertainment to the audience and a workshop where new ideas are continually fashioned.

### *Nāṭyachaṭa* THE MONOLOGUE:

Another recent and very popular theatrical form is the *Nāṭyachaṭa* of North Karnatak or the *Ekapātra* of Mysore. Its effectiveness lies in its technical expertise. An individual actor, all alone on the stage, creates for himself and the spectator, the illusion of a play. Like a man in the drawing room carrying a conversation with his wife who is in the kitchen, the actor converses with his invisible and inaudible opposite role and replies to all the latter's whys and wherefores: a play is being enacted but only one character speaks. *Nāṭyachaṭa* crowns the work of a clever actor. Its duration is necessarily much shorter than that of a one-act play, for it would otherwise become monotonous. Its tone is humourous and its method arresting. Many a *nāṭyachaṭa*

like Ksheerasagara's *Mallige Chappara* has a charming and sustaining theme and becomes impressive only because of the actor's talent. It does not provide for any intense dramatic action on the stage but it can certainly picture a humorous situation and build up a climax. It is the intelligent use of the actor's voice and his capacity to change the emotions sharply and quickly that brings success to the Nātyachata. The first nātyachatas of scintillating humour like *Rāyapūje* came from the pen of the late Kaujalagi Hanumantarao, one of the most brilliant writers of Bijapur. The later ones like *Hālugandu* of Krishnakumar, *Edavida Kandilu* of Sriranga, *Mallige Chappara* and *Layer Prayāṇa* of Ksheerasagara established the nātyachata as an ideal mode for a short and light entertainment. Later writers like N. K. Kulkarni, Ranganath, N. S. Gadagkar, and M. N. Babu contributed many more such 'mono-plays'. The Nātyachata has further simplified the method of production, for, it does not call for any settings and other elaborate stage properties. Still, a suggestive and pointed nātyachata, well performed, is as satisfying as a one-act play.

#### THE SHADOW-PLAY:

The Shadow-play is an interesting experiment as a specialised technique in play-production. It has every accessory of a regular stage play with a theme and playing actors; but here, the spectator beholds not the actor in flesh and blood but only his shadow in black on the white screen. Unlike as in the Folk-theatre, wherein the coloured image (*Togalu Bombe*) is manipulated into performing the drama, the modern shadow play is enacted by amateur actors *behind* a fixed white screen that covers the entire stage. With the help of a powerful lamp, the shadows of the actors are made to fall on the screen in sharp features. The artist synchronises his words or songs with gestures which are to an extent, exaggerated. Delicate facial expressions are of no avail in the shadow play. The actor has to move his limbs with a planned perfection so that the shadow can convey the desired 'action'. He stands close to the screen so that his *Shadow in profile* falls on it, and he moves only forward and backward along the screen, close to it, for if he moved even slightly out of his marked path towards the light, his shadow suddenly grows in size. He has to be equally careful in the movement of his limbs, for, a hand half extended may produce a shadow where it looks as though the hand is sticking out of the stomach. The actor in the shadow play is perhaps more a technician than an artist. An intelligent employment of delicate dance

postures and movements will bring considerable charm to the shadow play.

The method of make-up is entirely different in the shadow play, for it is not the actor but his shadow that is to be presented to the audience. Paints are unnecessary; costumes are all. Most of the artist's ornaments and costumes are made of thick paper where in attractive designs are cut. They are tied to him with threads.

The shadow play provides immense possibilities in presentation. Within a split second the little 'dwarf' on the screen could become—by moving towards the light—a fantastically huge figure occupying it entirely like the great Vāmana who filled earth and heaven. As in the trick photography, giants and normal men can be brought together on the screen of the shadow play. Aladin can be made to talk to his giant, make him disappear and appear as he desires; all this as realistically as you please. Exploiting these possibilities, Karanth wrote and produced three shadow plays with great effect, *Rakta Kānike* dealt symbolically with economic inequality, *Devi Dēhi* told the story of the downtrodden Hindu woman and her ultimate emancipation, and *Hiriya Dēvaru* had for its theme the liberation of man from the shackles of blind faith. In all these plays Karanth tried new experiments in the shadow technique with considerable success. A great illusion was created in the play *Devi Dēhi*, where Sumane, Surame and Sujale who were infuriated by the treatment given to them by man, raised themselves into a huge stature of immense strength and joined together to form one colossal super-human being with three heads and six arms. Karanth's *Lava Kuśa* also, which has the armies and warfare in it, made a great impression in its shadows on the screen. The shadow-play deserves every encouragement from theatre-lovers, for it both brings a fresh charm to our stage and provides a new scope for fantasy.

#### THE RADIO PLAY:

Though the radio play has no direct connection with the stage, professional or amateur, its indirect influence on the modern playwright, actor, and on some aspects of stage-production seems to be unmistakable. The Kannada radio play has grown in volume and variety during the last two decades, bringing an awareness of new and varying themes, and creating a taste for them. Mythological and historical plays are no less popular than the social ones on the air. With an equal emphasis on different modes like the prose play, opera, folk play, fantasy and the children's play, the radio provides a panorama of the various

manifestations of the Karnatak theatre through its own specialised medium. Radio adaptations of many a 'classical' stage play brought back the old playwrights again. The radio has thus substantially helped to revive the old themes of the theatre, at the same time encouraging modern experiments.

The radio-play has its own technique and great possibilities. It is essentially a sound picture, a 'play for the blind'; it has to say all that it desires to say through sounds, words and music. It has thus to concentrate on the best use of voice, words and music. It trains the erstwhile stage actor to avoid the sing song manner of speech, the ranting about and the tearing a passion to tatters which is so commonly seen on the stage. The radio-play has also been able to deal convincingly with a large number of themes—many of which are beyond the scope of the stage—mainly through a careful blending of effect-music, sounds and calculated methods of speech. *Karna* of Kailasam, *Ritu Yatre* of Karanth, *Śūdra Tapasvi* of Puttappa and other plays and operas written in the grand manner lend themselves more easily and effectively to radio production than to stage production. Pure literary plays, fantasies as well as intimate family pictures suit the radio. Themes where in Nature in any of its varied manifestations like floods, rain and thunder, earth-quake or volcano has intimate role to play, suit the radio much more than the stage. The requirements and conditions of the radio, when applied to the stage production, would necessarily be for the latter's benefit. So far as the playwright is concerned, the radio has impressed on him the benefits of brevity and sharpness in dialogue; it has taught him the secrets of intelligent arrangement of thoughts and words. With regard to the theme, an organic development of the plot, characterisation and intelligent dialogue, what would suit the radio may as well suit the stage—and that is how, many a Kannada playwright has written both for the the radio and the stage.

#### CHILDREN'S THEATRE:

We have not done much to entertain our children in the right manner. In spite of stray plays and mimes contributed by some of the champions of the childrens' cause like Hoysala, Puttappa, Karanth Rajarathnam and Pandurangarao, it looks as though children have been most neglected with regard to the stage. Until very recently, children had at best to content themselves witnessing the shows performed by adults for adults. This unfortunate position is in glaring

contrast to the amenities provided for children in the West and in Russia where a fully developed Children's theatre has assumed the status of a nation building institution. The Children's theatre takes care to produce different types of plays to different age groups. The specialist playwright, actor and producer use their best judgement and put in their best efforts to cater to the growing mind of the child. Shakespeare and many an other classic have been re-adapted to suit the children's theatre; new modes of theatrical presentations are experimented on; new themes are worked out for the child and a continuous effort is made to understand the child's mind and his needs.

The love of the dramatic is inborn in the child: he has a great fascination for the symbolic representation. A broken chair can become a golden throne for him and a long stick, a royal steed. The inanimate is his intimate friend, and he often creates two characters within himself each talking along to the other. This predilection of the child can be fully exploited by the wise writer and actor who can stir and move the heart of children with comparatively limited means at their disposal, and can open to them new worlds of beauty and goodness. It needs an expert to harness the power of imitation and mimicry in children. It needs a specialist to entertain and enlighten them with plays produced especially for them, possibly by children themselves. Theme and presentation cannot afford to be beyond their reach, nor can they be common for all age-groups.

Before the Amateur stage turned its attention to children, the professional stage did try some experiments. The attempt was just to develop a taste in children for enacting plays. G. H. Veeranna started children's troupe in 1924 under the title *Bālakalāvārdhini Nataka Sangha* and ran it on professional lines for about two decades as a branch of the Gubbi Company. This troupe of young artists toured in different parts of Karnatak and staged mythological plays like *Śrī Kṛiṣṇa Līla*, *Kaṁsa Vadha*, *Rukmiṇi Swayamvara*, *Kṛiṣṇa Gārudi* and *Sāvītri*. On the same lines ran another troupe of child artists — the *Akka Mahādevi Kṛipa poshita Mandali* of Kollegal, organised by G. P. Mallappa. A third troupe was born in Bombay—*The Ananda Sangeeta Nataka Mandali* which paid visits to Bangalore and other important towns in Karnatak.<sup>1</sup> These troupes had a certain professional 'polish and perfection' and earned money: but they were hardly of any real service to children. The themes selected by these troupes were too heavy, the dialogues stagy, the music unnatural and the production

1. *Rangabhoomi*: Vol. 2, pp. 41 and 52.

pompous and artificial. From another point of view, these virtually were professional troupes with all their vices, though run by young boys and girls.<sup>1</sup> These were far from a children's theatre.

It was the Amateur theatre which tried to understand the needs of children. A number of plays were specially written and staged. Karanth wrote and got enacted by the school children of Mangalore a few pantomimes. *Ispeetu Gulāma*, a subtle satire on the caste system, is recorded to have been a good success on the children's stage. *Geddavara Satya*, which portrayed world politics as a fight between various animals ending in the victory of brutal strength, charmed its child audiences. One of the oldest and most beloved of children's plays is K. V. Puttappa's *Nanna Gopāla*. This charming play pictured in a simple and affectionate atmosphere, the story of a child whose faith made God appear here below in human shape. *Modannana Tamma*, another play of Puttappa is equally popular with the children of Mysore. It deals with a cloud persuading a little boy to stay back home with his mother. Several short and charming plays of the good hearted Hoysala like *Kalla Sullā Mallā*, *Agilina Magalu*, *Magu* and *Vātapi* provided rich entertainment to children. Among other notable plays for children, a mention may be made of *Amma* and *Bābarana Pātṭha* of Kaiwar Rajarao, *Sompina Sāgara* of Sadashiviah and *Sullina Sōlu* of Pandurangarao. These plays hold a promise for the future, though taken together, they form but a slender volume. A new awareness of the needs of children is in evidence. Children's films are now being made in India; children's festivals are being organised on a nation wide scale and the importance of extra-curricular activities in the education of the child has been recognised. It is but natural that every town and village will now take up the question of a stage for its children and build up a children's theatre on a sound foundation. Such a theatre will benefit not only the child but also the village, the town and the Kannada speaking land itself.

#### FUTURE OF THE SOCIAL PLAY:

The amature stage of Karnatak seems to have justified itself by catering to the educated section of the society which was tired of the professional stage. If made an effort to bring drama nearer to life. It

೧. ವೀರಣ್ಣ ನವರ . . . . . “ ಕಂಪನಿಯಲ್ಲಿದ್ದಾಗಲೇ ಅವರ ‘ ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಕಂಪನಿ ’ ಯಲ್ಲಿನ ಕಾಮಮಯ ಪ್ರಪಂಚವನ್ನು ನೋಡಿ ನಾನು ತುಂಬ ನೊಂದುಕೊಂಡಿದ್ದೆ. ಹಣದ ಆಶೆಯಿಂದ ಈ ಮಕ್ಕಳ ನೈತಿಕ ಭವಿಷ್ಯ ನೀವು ಕೆಡಿಸುತ್ತಿಲ್ಲವೆ ಎಂದು ಅವರಿಗೊಮ್ಮೆ ಪತ್ರ ಬರೆದಿದ್ದೆ ” ಶಿವರಾಮ ಕಾರಂತ: ಹುಚ್ಚುಮನಸ್ಸಿನ ಹತ್ತು ಮುಖಗಳು, ಪುಟ ೨೪೨.

angrily dismissed the idea that the stage was 'an amusement of an idle hour' but strove to fashion the stage as an 'instrument of national rejuvenation.' It created the Play of Ideas at a time when the established drama had lost itself on epic heights and among romantic mists; it tried to rationalise the production in pursuit of realism; it conducted successful experiments in new dramatic forms and stage craft: it encouraged talented people to take to the stage as a hobby and braved a new path, immaterial of the predilections of its audiences.

It has had achievements to its credit, but to day, it looks as though the amateur drama can not claim to be capable of serving all tastes, for it seems to have a total disregard for the spectacular: often it did not even insist on a wholesome theme; it could not always claim a high standard of histrionic ability or even a fair smoothness of performance, for many of its actors treated their hobby with a light heartedness and a casualness which was an insult even to a hobby. The amateur stage started with indifference to popular taste, and naturally, it came to be treated with the same indifference by the masses.

Surely, the amateur stage has not outlived its utility, but it has disappointed those who expected it in course of time to become a power to reckon with both as entertainment and as a means of social education. Troupes, artists and playwrights have now to heed the demands of the present-day public in order to keep the amateur stage stable and useful.

The strength and stability of the amateur stage depends more upon its organised troupes rather than on college or high school groups which are too unsteady to effect any progress. A well organised and merited troupe could wield a real influence on society. The strength of such a troupe lies in its artist. He will have to sacrifice his ego for the sake of his team, and should see to it that he makes way to the more talented colleague when necessary: and the latter, instead of revelling in personal triumph, must train up the less experienced artist by providing him the opportunities he needs. The stage need not depend on the brilliance of a single artist, for the play itself may provide little that is 'brilliant' for him to perform. The past of the amateur stage is a warning against the dictatorship of 'brilliant artists' who made the troupe an adjunct to their own vanity. Secondly, the amateur artist will have to treat the stage with more seriousness, and pay more attention to rehearsals.

The modern playwright also has a responsibility towards the amateur stage. He has been brilliant indeed, but he has not always

been deep enough or powerful enough. The modern play has come to be criticised as having narrowed down the scope of showmanship in the theatre. It is often too topical to live long, the bubble of a short moment. Many amateur plays including those of Kailasam written in a regional dialect caters only to a particular area unlike professional plays which are received well in most parts of the Kannada land. The modern play of ideas has lost a considerable measure of its theatrical strength, for it caters only to a small section—the intelligent section—of the society, and that also in a particular area.

This state of affairs should make the modern playwright reconsider his position, for his play seems to have lost the support of the people as it started with indifference to their tastes. And it has proved to be too thin even to the intelligentsia for whom it was proclaimed to be meant. The educated now turn to the film rather than to the amateur stage, and in the film theatre meet once again the old music and dance, the old gods, demons and saints. The modern play seems to be severely left alone both by the masses and the elite. The reason is perhaps that “it did not touch the basic primeval fundamental things in human nature, but was content dealing with the problems of day to-day life.”<sup>1</sup> The strong passions, the soaring idealism, the faith in man's lofty stature and his proximity to the gods of the upper air and the bewildering mixture of the serious and the ludicrous—these are the life-breaths of real drama. On these was built the strength of great masters like Kalidasa, Shakespeare, Aeschylus and Sophocles. The masters thrived because these elements gave their plays great internal strength and made them stage worthy for all times. The professional stage of karnatak believed in popular support and catered to popular taste, but the amateur stage, in its pursuit for realism, forgot that the last word is, after all, with the audience. The modern play-wright has to take stock of the situation afresh, and make up lost ground as far as he can.

‘Atleast in the immediate present it looks that the future of the drama of karnatak depends on the Amateur theatricals until such a time when the professional theatre of a bigger order comes into being.’ The Amateur stage needs to consolidate itself. Instead of being an ‘Incidental’ of festivals, Association annuals and college gatherings, it has to acquire more strength and attain a higher status. It has to realise that popular support is an essential precondition of the existence of the stage. It has to shed its snobbish airs of superiority, and meet even the illiterate audience half way.

1. Prof. A. N. Moorthy Rao : A broadcast speech.

## VIII

### PROSPECT

The theatre of the Kannada land can boast of almost an unbroken history of a thousand years. It must have flourished in the ancient past in two forms one, catering to the common people and the other, to the learned audiences in the royal court. It is possible that the former developed the pure native (*dēshi*) mode of entertainment while the latter accepted and staged the then all pervading Sanskrit drama and, sometimes, its translations. In addition, the court developed a particular type of dance drama that resembled the modern *Kathakkali*, a drama that resulted out of an intimate contact with the popular *dēshi* mode. The *dēshi* mode retained its chief characteristic features almost wholly intact through the ages, though changing in minor ways when forced to do so, and giving birth to new regional varieties as the centuries passed. Yakṣagāna and Doḍḍāṭa, two typical varieties of the *dēshi* mode provided the inspiration for the professional theatre of both Maharastra and Karnatak. The professional theatre lived a life of colour and pomp and contributed to the shaping of the first professional theatre of Andhra and Tamilnad. Later, when a literary revolt swept over the country, the intelligentsia declared that the professional theatre was 'outmoded', and turned their energies to the fostering of the new social drama of ideas. Drama, they said, has to picture life as it exists: it has no right to day dream or to romanticise. Even recent times exhibit different phases of our theatre, each with its own theatrical emphasis. If the emphasis was on the *grandeur of portrayal* in the folk stage, it is on the *talent of the actor* in the professional stage and the *potentialities of the playwright* in the amateur stage. All these three phases of the Karnatak theatre concurrently exist today, each catering to its own specific audiences.

At the turn of the century, one could pause and look back with satisfaction at the impressive career of the Kannada stage during the preceding fifty years. It looked established. It could boast of a prolific dramatic literature of original and translated plays: it had a number of itinerant troupes. *Mitravinda Govinda* of Narasingaraya, the first available Kannada play, dated 1680, was revived. The Yakshagana Group of Kirki, which visited Sangli in 1842, had initiated the commercial stage in Maharashtra; Turamuri Seshagirirao had rendered

*Sakuntala* into Kannada in 1869; and Kannada *Javadis* had contributed in moulding the music of the Marathi stage. D. Krishnamacharlu, the first playwright of the Telugu stage, was so impressed with the performances of the visiting troupes from Mysore and Dharwar that he wrote his first play *Swapna Aniruddha* in Kannada. His friends, he says, were of the firm opinion that Kannada was the language for writing drama. Later in the nineteenth century, the Kannada stage in north Karnataka, faced by the challenge of the Marathi theatre, consolidated itself under the guidance of Sakkari Balacharya (Santakavi). He was indeed the *Karnataka-nataka Prathamaguru*. He wrote more than fifteen full-length plays and trained his troupe, the Kritapurastha Natakamandali of Gadag. Royal patronage had helped to stabilise the Mysore stage. By 1885, the professional stage became a reality, and the scholars got busy translating plays from Sanskrit, Marathi and English dramatic literatures to meet the new demands.

The period from 1880 to the end of the second decade of the present century was one of original mythological plays and translation of classical plays from other languages. Under the patronage of Chamaraja Wodeyar, scholars like Karibasappa Sastri, Ayya Sastri, D. N. Mulbagal and Gururayacharya brought out translations of almost every known Sanskrit play, of Bhasa, Sudraka, Kalidasa, Visakhadatta, Bhavabhuti, Bhattanarayana and Kshemeswara. Karibasappa Sastri, the most celebrated of them, was hailed as the 'Abhinava Kalidasa' because of his rendering of *Śakuntala* into Kannada.

The North Karnataka stage, however, drew plays from the Marathi dramatic literature. Gururao K. Mamadapur, Mudavidu Krishna Rao, Wamanrao Master and Garud Sadashivrao rendered major Marathi plays into Kannada. Most of the well-known Telugu plays also, particularly of Veereshalingam Pantulu, were translated by Nanjangudu Shrikanthasastri. A large number of plays in English, mostly of Shakespeare, were rendered into Kannada by a host of literary men led by Gundo Krishna Churamury and Kerur Vasudevacharya in North Karnataka and C. Subba Rao, A. Anand Rao and M. L. Shrikantha Gowda in Mysore. In later years, a few Bengali plays, like *Tapobala* of G. C. Ghosh, *Krisnakumari* of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Shajahan* of D. L. Roy, were also translated into Kannada by C. K. Venkataramaiah, M. N. Kamat and B. Puttuswamiah.

To say that early dramatic literature in Kannada came from other languages like Sanskrit and English is not to undervalue the original contributions of Santakavi, Srinivasa Kavi (Venkannacharya Agala-

gatti), Veerappa Sastri, Rajakavi Srinivasa Iyengar and others. By 1921, Bellave Narahari Sastri had, in the words of E. P. Rice, become 'one of the most prolific dramatic authors.' Narayana Rao Huilgol and Garuda had written even social plays for the stage and Kandgal Hanumantarao joined them later. The early plays dealt with different themes mostly drawn from ancient romantic lore, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata*. Later, beginning with the third decade of the present century, lives of saint-poets like Tukaram, Kabir and Sarana Basava (by Garuda), Hemaraddi Mallamma (by Bellave) and Akka Mahadevi (by B. Puttuswamiah) came to be depicted on the stage. In the new atmosphere of resurgent nationalism came the plays dealing with the lives of our heroes and heroines like Ecchama Nayaka, Tipu Sultan, Nargund Babasahib and Kittur Chennamma. Occasionally even a social play like *Sikshana Sambhrama* or *Samsara Nauka* crept in. But the stage looked too much overloaded with gods and goddesses, demons and witches. The language of the plays was heavy, literary and artificial. The presentation was crude with excessive settings and gaudy costumes. Pantomime was substituted for acting. Stage-music ran riot except when handled by a genius like Varadachar. The shows were far too lengthy and slow-moving for they had to span the period from dusk to dawn.

This caused a natural reaction among the newly educated intelligentsia who demanded the intellectual play and a rational presentation. There was a move to uproot the existing order of the commercial stage and to put something better in its place. Iconoclastic playwrights like Kailasam in Mysore, Sriranga in North Karnataka and Karanth in South Kanara ushered in the period of revolt in the twenties.

A new literary order with its new drama emerged. Tastes had changed and the amateur stage was there to express it. This inevitably had its effect on the professional. He made hurried compromises by changing his themes and manner of presentation. The Halageri Company had already switched over to the social play. Garud's plays like *Paschattapa* and *Satya Sankalpa*, though historical in setting, were social in spirit and implication. The celebrated Mohammad Peer held the stage with Simha's social play, *Samsar nauka*. Later, K. Hirannayya triumphed with his great satires like *Devadasi* and *Makmal Topi*. Even the Gubbi Company, which had found its greatest glory in mythological themes, took to staging social plays like *Nishamahime*, *Sahukara* and *Kalachakra*.

The amateur stage continued to gain strength. Its aim was now

to see that theatre did not remain a mere entertainer. Its role was to teach as well and to combat social diseases like blind faith, illiteracy, casteism, unequal marriage, the dowry system, drunkenness and the like.

The new drama developed in different channels. The blank-verse play gradually came into its own, The legendary play, verse-play, the musical, phantasy and the opera followed. Later, the discussion play, the impromptu-play and the radio play came into the field. Though mythological and historical themes were touched now and then, this period marked the supremacy of social themes which started with Narayanarao Huilgol in North Karnataka and Kailasam in Mysore. Kailasam, Sriranga and Karanth, the leading trio of the revolt, wrote fearlessly and ceaselessly for three decades using sharp weapons of irony and satire. Karanth remained a great experimenter in themes and theatre-modes. Kailasam and Sriranga touched a variety of themes, mostly dealing with middle-class life—ripping open the social organism, laying bare pretention and hypocrisy. A. N. Krishna Rao brought in his scalpel too. A touch of high individual brilliance was given by D. R. Bendre with his biting satire in plays like *Uddhara* and *Sayo Ata*. V. K. Gokak gave a glimpse of his pointed humour in his *Vimarsaka Vaidya*, but turned to more purposeful ideological plays like *Jananayaka* and *Yugantara*. Senior writers like R. S. Mugali, Krishna Kumar Kallur, L. J. Bendre and N. K. Kulkarni added a good deal of variety to the social drama of North Karnataka. The Kailasam tradition was brilliantly continued by G. P. Rajaratnam and kept up by Parvatavani. Ksheerasagara and Kaiwara Raja Rao gave interesting domestic pictures. One-act plays came into their own. A host of writers—old and young—including K. T. Puranik, M. N. Babu, Kumara Venkanna, K. Gundanna and Dasarathi Dixit contributed to the bulk of the new dramatic literature.

Thus Kannada dramatic literature came to be substantial in volume because of its social drama, but, surely, it would have suffered in substance and variety but for the blank-verse drama built to such a grand eminence by K. V. Puttappa and his senior contemporaries like B. M. Srikantiah, Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, D. V. Gundappa and M. R. Srinivasa Murthy. The historical plays of Samsa, that strange genius 'who possessed a Shakespearean apprehension of character, plot and atmosphere'; the grand operas of P. T. Narasimhachar and also of Keertinath Kurtkoti; the striking folk plays of Ajjampur; the adaptations of Mathew Arnold, Molière, Ibsen and Shakespeare by V. Sitarimah, A. N. Moorthy Rao, S. G. Sastri and Parvatavani; the

impromptu-plays given by N. Kasturi; the comic opera, shadow-plays and mimes fashioned by Karanth; the dramatic monologues of Kaujalagi Hanumanta Rao, Ksheerasagara and Krishna Kumar; the radio plays of Sivaswamy, Chaduranga, Beechi, Betageri and Ramachandra Sarma and the children's plays by Puttappa, Hoysala and others have all helped to make the contemporary drama what it is. L.J. Bendre, V. M. Inamdar, G. G. Hegde and Parvatavani hold out promise of becoming Kannada's major playwrights.

After the first flush of excitement, however, one began to realise that the weakness of the amateur stage lay in its very strength—the experimenting playwright often stood on uncertain ground, the actor from the University was a dilettante, the play of ideas sacrificed the emotional appeal, and the colloquial still waited to be forged into a weapon of power. It certainly looked as though the Kannada stage, in spite of its heavy bulk of social drama, had lost its moorings because of its emphasis on catering to the classes. It seemed cut off from the main stream of life, and the irony of it was that, after two decades, even the educated seemed weary of the new drama, which in any case had been left severely alone by the common man.

The partition and national independence brought in a rich variety of themes in our drama. The unification of the Kannada-speaking areas brought an awareness of ourselves and a sense of self-evaluation. Now, with the encouragement given to the stage and the playwright, the Kannada theatre seems to be finding its feet again. Yakshagana is coming into its own. The professional stage is consolidating itself as seen by the recent long runs of Gubbi's *Daśāvatāra*, Yenigi Balappa's *Basaveswara*, Puttaraj Gawai's *Hemareddi Mallamma*, and Chittarigi Company's *Jeevanayatre*. The amateur stage seems to be at work again with a greater determination, as evidenced by the activities of several talented troupes. Drama Conferences and Festivals are proving beneficial to the resurrection of the stage. The audience is becoming increasingly thoughtful and critical. Here lies the real hope for the Kannada stage. In rebuilding it, its writer has to remember the lessons of the past. The new drama should not cut itself adrift from the main stream of life. It should not concentrate too much, as Moorthy Rao puts it, 'on passing problems of day to day life, but touch the basic, primeval, fundamental things,' which the great dramatist in any country has always done. It is in such a playwright that the strength and stability of the future Kannada drama lies.<sup>1</sup>

A new movement to revive the linguistic theatre is afoot. It is necessary that its three branches—the folk, the professional and the amateur stage—should be treated on different footings when extending the much needed support. Each one of them fulfils a special purpose of its own, and needs individual attention. The professional theatre which can yet become the most vital of art-institutions if suitably encouraged, deserves a special word here. It is the professional troupe that dedicates itself entirely to the cause of the stage. It lives both in the village and the city, interpreting the one to the other. It can not be placed on the same footings as the well fed cinema with regard to entertainment tax. It has pleaded with the Government that this burden may be taken off its weak shoulders. The Administration, which is interested in reviving the theatre may respond to this desperate cry of the professional stage.

The professional stage needs to elevate the economic condition of its actor. It is he more than others that slaves for the stage, and does his best to interpret the culture of the land to succeeding generations, and to give pleasure to his audiences. It is unfortunate that the actor has always remained uncared for. He has no fixed income to live on; he has no security of service. What need we say of the average actor when even great masters like Varadachar, Peer and even Garud ended their days in poverty and hunger? He is not paid sufficiently, he can ill afford a comfortable living and the quip that an actor is an actor because he is unfit for any other profession is perhaps not a great exaggeration. It is the immediate responsibility of the State and the society to stabilise his position by assuring him of a living wage and human conditions of work.

The economic condition of the playwright is not a whit better than that of the actor. It has been the plight of the playwright to pursue another full-time profession to earn a living; he would cease to live if he depended entirely on the royalties. Consequently, he can not direct all his attention and energy towards writing for the stage. Many an individual who has considerable dramatic sense and fair mastery over the technique of employing ideas and words, has been forced against his natural inclinations to write novels in preference to plays. Not that the novels are sure to give him a living wage, but because plays are sure to let him down financially. The playwright, at least, has to earn a precarious living by hanging on to the professional troupes, themselves impoverished. The playwright is an interpreter of his country's life and culture, of whom it is demanded that his plays should instruct,

please and uplift his audience and move them to right and useful action. But the tragedy is that society does not remember its duty to him as well as his duty to it. It denies him his daily wage, and disclaims all responsibility for his plight. It is necessary that to-day, when the days of royal or feudal patrons are done with, democracy should take full responsibility for providing a living wage to the writer of plays.

The Kannada people have to study the regional theatres in the country in order to understand the secret of the success of some others. The professional stage of Maharashtra for instance, has made great strides inspite of the film and the new play. Its success has been due to several factors, but the most important factor has been the great interest the people have evinced in their theatre. They are proud of their theatre and consider it a symbol of their artistic and cultural advancement. The press and critic are very much alive to the theatre. Plays are written for contests and through these plays, the stage renews itself every year. The Drama Festivals conducted to Bombay bring to the stage, scores of plays—old and new—produced by troupes drawn from all over the region. While providing a feast of talent to its great audiences, the Drama Festival reestablishes the stage every year and makes it more powerful as an institution. Another noteworthy achievement of the Festival is that it brings the stage and the screen nearer to each other. After all, the stage supplies the screen its dialogue—writer, its actor and its musician. The film supplies the leading actors of the stage—that glamour which always spells ever greater popularity. The stage and the screen can derive much strength from one another if they co-operate. The Kannada country also should see to it that every noted screen actor and actress remains an artist of the stage also, particularly in the Annual Festivals.<sup>1</sup> The artists should themselves welcome this opportunity of appearing on the stage, for it brings them the immense joy of playing directly before people who adore and honour their talent.

Such a close co-operation between the stage and the screen is particularly necessary in Karnatak where every artist seems to treat the stage as a platform for that basic training which qualifies him for the screen. When he becomes a film actor, however, he seems to develop a total indifference for the stage. It should not be below the dignity of the

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1. It is true that Drama Conferences were organised previously in Karnatak, in 1929 at Dharwar, and later at Bangalore, Navalgund and Bellary. But they are not being conducted annually, nor are they on a region-wide scale, and the screen artist has evinced little interest in them.

screen artist to appear on the Stage. The revolution made by the stage in contemporary times, under the guidance of Prithviraj Kapur, leader of the Prithvi Theatres— an Amateur troupe for that matter— clearly indicates that a talented artist can always make the stage more attractive and powerful than the screen. The Kannada Land has yet to wait for a leader like Prithviraj who can be indifferent to the screen in Preference to the stage<sup>1</sup>

The social and cultural institutions also owe a duty to the stage. They can give a further impetus to the stage by arranging Anniversaries of the countries noted playwrights and artists, who deserve as lofty a place of honour in society as its politicians and social workers, for the artists also slave in their own sphere for the country's advancement. Anniversaries of playwrights like Śāntakavi, Turamuri and Basavappa śāstri and artists like Varadachar, Peer and Handiganur will bring back their plays and their roles on the stage once again; they will remind the people of the lives of these great ones, and revive interest in the work they had done so single mindedly when they were alive.

Educational and cultural institutions owe an obligation to the theatre. Their service to the theatre could as well be a part of their normal work. It is true that institutions like the Vidyā Vardhak Sangh, Kannada Sāhitya Parishat and various Karnātak Sanghs have put in considerable effort in the cause of the Kannada theatre. Their service is all the more needed now, at a time when there is an opportunity for the stage to stabilise itself on account of the supporting hand of the Government and when a new conscience is waiting to be handled both in the community and the artist. The theory and practice of drama is a subject of vital interest to all workers in the educational and cultural fields and such a study will inspire at least a few talented people to take to the stage. The study of dramaturgy should find a place in the curriculum of our Universities. Such a move would go a long way in establishing the stage as a really important cultural activity of the country.

Cultural institutions and Universities need to preserve the story of the theatre by collecting and publishing plays, biographies of playwrights, artists and producers and other significant material. They thus render a signal service also to the literature of the region. They should establish a Museum of the Karnatak Theatre consisting of scripts and other extant material, research centres to conduct experiments in the

1. Very recently an effort in this direction was made by G. V. Iyer who collected some of the Kannada screen artists and went round the country staging plays. These shows were most enthusiastically attended.

arts of make-up, costumes and lighting and libraries with books on the theatre-arts of the world. All this will create a new interest in the theatre among the people and provide new inspiration to the talented young man who is attracted to the stage.

It is true that there is a need for an influential and representative central institution to guide all these activities in the cause of the stage and to bring about a consciousness among the people of their theatre and their duty to it. The aims of the Indian National Theatre and the Theatre centres are the same. But it is after all the people who provide the necessary strength to such institutions. Only when the people are convinced that they need the stage in the interest of the cultural advancement of the country, these institutions will get their strength automatically. What may seem a miracle will surely materialise when the people awaken to their real needs. The task now is to awaken the people from their torpor. This has to be done by determined institutions and also by individuals, whether they are artists, playwrights ordinary citizens or servants of the State.

Karnatak has to guard against that type of snobbishness which looks down upon study and hard work in matters of art. It is all well to say that the art of acting is not for the academies, the actor's University is the world; that the true artist is born and not made, and that a country get the theatre it deserves: but treatises, rules and courses of study must be made for the man of average talent though not for the man of genius. And after all, even the Conservatoire of France or the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art of England can not give genius to those who do not have it. Institutions like these can however teach the art of employing one's national gifts to the best effect, can teach the use of gesture, and the development and control of voice and initiate the novice into the psychology of character. As Sir Beerbohm Tree said:

"You can not communicate to a flower the secret of existence; you can not teach a plant to grow; but the careful gardener can, by fostering it, by tending it and training it, by plucking up the choking weeds, by lopping up superfluous branches, enables it to develop healthy, to flower in perfect beauty and to bring forth fruit in due season. So we shall hope by means of the school to train the student, to pluck out the dangerous weeds of trickery which beset him, to lop off superfluous branches of convention, so that in due time the nature within him may blossom forth and come to fruition."

Such training may make of the learner at least a good actor if not a great one. And the need for good actors is never non-existent. Every profession calls for study and prescribes training, and so should the art of the theatre. The Kannada country has yet to move in the direction of establishing an Academy of Dramatic art which can provide such study and training.

Thus the theatre of Karnatak looks forward to external support, support given to it by the State, the community and the educational and cultural institutions. Its internal strength is to be provided by the artist, the playwright, the producer and the frank but sympathetic critic. Its future depends on all these, and the contribution they are willing to make to the cause of their theatre.

The professional troupe itself has to realise what it should strive for, and appreciate the difficulties and dangers which beset the path of fulfilment. It has to rise from its sloth to determined action. As Shaw said:

“the theatre like a Church is a place where people congregate together. If one could not get the people to learn the noblest lessons of life in Church, you must give them a theatre in which they could learn these lessons”.

Indeed such is the great but true responsibility of the theatre and to fulfil this responsibility, the theatre needs to learn self-respect, but it also needs to be treated with respect. It needs a stability, a stability that rests on the consolidation of professional troupes. The troupes will have to organise themselves into a force to be reckoned with. Democracy has taught the individual that his strength lies in Union. Karnataka's artists, playwrights and producers will have to come together into a single organisation dedicated to the service of their art. Through such a unity, the stage will gain strength, the position of the artist will be stabilised, and he will learn his first lesson in self-discipline. The strength of the organisation will be immense when it convinces the country of its sincerity and willingness to do useful work.

Apart from the establishment of such a central organisation, each troupe will by itself have to become an organic unit and cease to be a mere appendage of an individual artist or playwright. It will certainly have to care for the tastes of the people, its patrons, though it may not cater to all tastes all too suddenly. Once the relations between it and the people have been established on a firm footing of reciprocity, the theatre can surely guide the people and teach them to distinguish the worthy from the unworthy.

The stage, particularly the Kannada professional stage has now to convince the country of its efforts to move out of the morass into which it landed itself a few decades ago. It has to acquaint itself with the theatrical amenities and technical devices provided in Western countries and Russia and use them fruitfully to this country. The theatre may, by all means, respect tradition, but it can no longer afford to stick to antiquated methods of portrayal and production.

Now in the year 1954,<sup>1</sup> the bitter reality has to be admitted that the Kannada land has not got a play-house worthy of its name, let alone a fully equipped stage with a revolving or a wagon-stage device. It is said that by 1911, London alone had 67 imposing and attractive play-houses, and United Kingdom had a total number of 738 play houses apart from 311 Music Halls. Nearly 40,000 people earned their living from the stage. England spent every year well over £ 25 million on entertainments.<sup>2</sup> This is but an example of the importance given to the theatre by a civilized country. The play-house itself is to be made a worthy hall for the audience to sit and enjoy the performance. This is apart from providing comfortable green-rooms, lounges and ready settings and scenery. If for the film, tasteful and comfortable showing houses could built, it could be done for the stage also. The beautiful art of the theatre a beautiful showing place, of physical torture is not to mar the pleasure of good play.

A last word about the playwright. It is the playwright who make the stage live. It is therefore necessary that he should be in close touch with the people who see his plays and their tastes and predilections. He should indeed do more experiments on new themes and modes; but not at the cost of his audience. The true quantum of his brilliance, his ability to make his work convincing, set the limit to the quantum of innovation he can put in. He can bring new beauty and power to his plays when he moderates his trial-blazing zeal.

The new theatre we dream of need not remain a dream. It will but materialise when that is an all-round effort, when the state, the community, the cultural and educational institutions of the country, the troupe itself, the individual artist, the critic and the playwright join hands to work for its establishment. Such a co-operative effort will recreate the theatre and make it a true interpreter of the culture and art

1. Conditions are not much improved even now— 1960.

2. A paper on "The stage as a potent factor" read by M. V. Ishwar Iyer in the Second Drama Conference convened by the A. D. A. in 1921, published reports.

of the region, a golden link between the village and the city and a potent factor in the task of national education. These objectives have already been achieved in other countries, and to some extent, in other regions of India like Bengal and Maharashtra. The Kannada land has to look back, look around and look ahead to recreate its theatre; a theatre worthy of its past and worthy of the glorious art and culture of the region; a theatre that exhilarates the artist and ennobles the spectator.

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